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FEATURE DETECTIVE STORY

The MYSTERY at ROARING WATERS

by

Harry Adler

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The MYSTERY at ROARING WATERS

by Harry Adler

CHAPTER ONE

THE CRIME IN THE NIGHT

A PEACEFUL, quiet night lay about the little car as it rolled purringly around the twisting curves of the road. It was more than an hour past midnight and the waning moon had just touched the topmost snow-capped peaks with a luminous softness. But in the depths of the canyon, where the road ran, the blackness lay like a plasmic mold, sliced sharply by the twin beams of the car's headlights.

To a driver less familiar with the road the speed at which the automobile traveled would have been fraught with extreme danger; for to one side the mountains rose to awesome heights, while the outer edge of the road dropped sheer to the banks of the boulder-strewn rushing river. Every inch of that road was as familiar to Cliff Prentiss as the floor of the room at Mrs. Porter's boarding-house. The greater part of his life had been spent in and around the camp at Roaring Waters.

Nita Hereford, seated in the roadster by Prentiss' side, snuggled down closer beneath the robes. Despite that it was midsummer the mountain air was chilly. She stifled a yawn.

"I'm so sleepy," she gasped. "I could roll over in the road and sleep for a week."

"We'd have been home long ago if it hadn't been for that darn tire," Prentiss complained. "Everybody that was down to the dance must be home and in bed by now."

"Next time we go to Cabin Center," Nita answered tartly, "we're going to use solid truck tires."

"If I had any sense I'd have seen that I had a spare. Oh, well, we're almost home now," he grinned.

As if to prove his words, the car topped a slight rise and a few scattered lights twinkled in the little flattened hollow below them.

They came from the street-lighting system of the gold dredging camp of Roaring Waters.

In a few minutes the night travelers were approaching the town's suburban buildings, the repair shops of the Golconda Gold Dredging Company. All was dark and still save for the soft purring of their own engine, until there suddenly sounded the startling report of a pistol-shot, a single scream of terror. Then there was a silence.

With an exclamation Cliff Prentiss grabbed for his brake. The car came to a screeching halt abreast the office building of

the Golconda Company, whence the shot and scream had issued.

"You stay here, Nita," Prentiss commanded sharply, and he leaped to the ground. As he dashed up the wooden steps his hand swung around to his hip pocket. The front door was ajar. When he entered he fancied he heard a soft slam of the rear door.

With furiously eager fingers Prentiss groped for the light button. At length he found it and jabbed the room into brightness. Nothing untoward was apparent in the ante-room, and Cliff ran over to the doorway leading into the superintendent's office. He switched on the light and a cry pealed from his lips. An inert form lay on the floor.

"The watchman!" Cliff murmured. "Poor old Dad Hines!"

He dropped to his knees by the side of the body and felt of the pulse. But the first glance had told him the old man was dead. The bullet had drilled his heart.

Nita, disregarding Cliff's command, had pressed close behind him into the room. Now she uttered a low cry of horror and sank into a chair.

"Poor old Dad Hines!" she cried.

The gaunt, gray-haired man lying dead on the floor had been one of Roaring Waters's first settlers. Arriving there in the days of the first gold rush, he had acquired a considerable fortune. But Frank Hines had been possessed of too large a heart. Never a hard-luck tale needed to be repeated or elaborated to him; worthy or unworthy, be the request large or small, no one ever left Frank Hines with empty hands. Prospectors down on their luck, tenderfoots with inflated hopes but flat grub-packs, all found him a ready giver. But the unscrupulous were not long in scenting easy game and in his old age, his substance gone, old Dad Hines had to take the job of night watchman for the Golconda Gold Dredging Company. The position was the kindly cloak that delicacy threw about what was virtually a pension. There was hardly a person in town who was not indebted to the old man for some kindness or other, rendered in Hines's day of prosperity, and as a consequence no one was more loved than he. Now he lay lifeless, his kind heart stilled by an assassin's bullet.

Prentiss ran along the corridor to the back door and peered out. But the blackness of the night baffled all search, and he returned to the room of tragedy.

Then, for the first time, he noticed that the big steel safe in one corner stood with its door wide open.

"Did they clean up at the dredge today?" he asked Nita, for the girl's father was the dredging company's superintendent.

"Yes," she answered. "Dad mentioned this morning at breakfast that he was going to clean up."

Cliff strode across the room and looked within the safe. There, untouched, lay a dully shining bar of gold, representing about ten days' operations of the dredge, and worth something over twenty-five thousand dollars.

"Dad Hines must have come in on the thief before he could finish the job," surmised Cliff; "and then, just as he finished poor old Dad, we broke in on his little party." He regarded the limp form on the floor. "I'd sure like to get my hands on that bird," he added grimly.

"Of all men, poor old Dad!" Nita cried. She buried her head in her hands and sobbed.

"Well," Cliff soliloquized, "as sheriff of Golden County, it sure looks like there's work for me."

His shuffling foot struck an object on the floor. He glanced down, stooped and picked up the article, and his breath sucked in with a startled intake. He shielded the object in his hand and looked up quickly at the girl. But she was sitting with her face drooped in her hands, and had not observed him. He dropped his find into his coat pocket and straightened up, but his eyes wore a peculiarly disturbed and troubled look.

"I'd better call the coroner and your dad," he remarked.

He seated himself at Bob Hereford's desk, picked up the telephone and called the superintendent's residence. At length a

sleepy sounding voice answered him. Briefly Cliff sketched the situation.

"I'll be right over!" the excited voice of Bob Hereford assured him, and the circuit closed with a bang.

The coroner was similarly summoned.

"You had better let me take you home, Nita," Cliff suggested. "There's no use of your sitting around here. You're tired, anyway, and this isn't any too pleasant a scene."

She waved his suggestion aside.

"I'll stay here," she said. "I can go home with dad later on."

While waiting for the others to arrive Cliff made a thorough inspection of the room; but no clue to the criminal revealed itself. Neither did a similar examination of the outer offices.

CHAPTER TWO

TANGLING THREADS

THE Hereford home was but a few blocks from the office. In a very few minutes Bob Hereford, big, heavy-set, his square, muscular face wrinkled in perturbation, darted into the room. He was coatless and collarless, and his head was bare.

A glance into the safe showed him that the precious gold bar, for whose security he was responsible, was still there. He slammed the door of the safe shut and twirled the knob with a sigh of relief.

"At least that's not gone!" he cried; then he turned and gazed at the dead form on the floor. "Poor old Hines," he grieved. His face set into an ominous scowl. "The dirty, cowardly dog! Isn't there any clue to show who killed him?"

"No," Cliff replied. "As I came in the front door it seemed to me that I heard the back door close; but when I looked out I couldn't see a sign of anybody. And there was nothing in the room here to help find him."

Nita, who had been sitting still, her brow wrinkled in puzzlement, spoke up suddenly.

"Cliff," she said, "the front door was open when you came up. Was it unlocked, or had it been forced open?"

"Why—I don't know." Swiftly he stepped out into the ante-room and examined the lock.

"There is no sign of force having been used," he explained, re-entering the room. "It must have been unlocked."

"Dad," Nita asked, as she turned to her father, "who had a key to the office besides yourself?"

"Well," the old man replied, "Hines, here, of course, had master keys to all the buildings, and Albert Morton had a key to the office."

"Morton," Cliff repeated thoughtfully. Albert Morton was chief clerk for the Golconda. "Of course," he went on, "I don't suppose it would be hard for an experienced crook to unlock that door, even if he didn't have the key."

The arrival of Tim Reaney, the coroner, a fat, double-chinned man, interrupted them. The jovial set of Reaney's face was now burdened with a look of serious concern.

"So they got poor old Dad!" he rumbled in a voice of deepest base. "Poor Dad—the best soul that ever the good Lord created!" Then he knelt and examined the dead body. "Must have died instantly," he announced. "Right through the heart. The black-hearted devil! May the Lord grant me the joy of laying him out in his coffin, as I've now got the sorrowful duty of doing for poor old Dad. How did you happen to run into this, Cliff?"

"Nita and I were coming home from the dance down at Cabin Center," Prentiss explained. "Just as we were going by the office we heard a shot. I stopped the car just as soon as I could and jumped out. And this is what I found."

"We might get Morton up here and see if he knows anything about this tragedy."

Prentiss again picked up the telephone. He called Morton's number and a sleepy sounding voice answered.

"Better come up to the office right away, Mr. Morton," Cliff requested. "There's been a murder and attempted robbery. Dad Hines is dead."

He hung up the receiver. They waited in heavy silence for Morton to arrive.

Morton, a bachelor, lived alone in a cabin several hundred yards behind the office, at the base of the mountains. In a few minutes he entered the room. He was tall, thin and narrow-chested; his face was sallow and the cheeks sunken; his pale eyes were set behind narrow-slit lids; his hair, ordinarily brushed sleekly back from the bony forehead, now hung in disheveled disarray. He, like Hereford, was without coat or collar.

"So they got poor old Dad Hines!" he exclaimed on entering the room.

"Yes," Cliff answered, "the old man's done for."

Morton glanced at the safe. "How about the gold brick?" he queried.

"That's O. K.," Hereford replied. "Cliff interrupted the robber before he could finish the job."

Again Prentiss recited his story, Morton listening with eyes shifting from Cliff's face to the floor and back again.

"And there's no clue—no sign or anything? In running away the crook didn't drop anything or forget anything that might help trace him?"

"No," Cliff said quietly. "Not a thing."

"You looked carefully?" insisted Morton.

It struck Cliff, in his present highly sensitized nervous state, that there was a rather strange insistence in Morton's manner. He shrugged his shoulders.

"You can look for yourself," he invited, "if you think I overlooked anything."

"Well, you may have passed up something in your excitement," Morton apologized for his seeming lack of dependence on the sheriff's efforts. Eagerly he commenced a minute examination of the room, and again Cliff's nerves were jarred by a seemingly over-anxious scrutiny of the floor before the safe.

Reaney and Hereford had joined Morton in his search for clues, but nothing developed.

Suddenly Morton stopped short. He turned to Cliff.

"Did you say the safe was open?" he queried.

"Yes," the sheriff affirmed.

Morton turned to Bob Hereford.

"You're the only person that knows the combination!"

Hereford ran his hand through his rumpled white hair.

"By George!" he cried; "that's right. It never struck me!"

With gaping mouths the little group stood staring at each other. Nita had jumped from her seat.

"Are you sure, dad?" she demanded. "Absolutely no one else?"

Her father shook his head.

"The combination is on file in the President's office in Chicago, so that the safe could be opened in case anything happened to me. But besides that I am the only person that knows it."

"It's not written down where somebody might find it?" demanded Cliff.

"No; I have purposely never recorded it, just to avoid any such chance."

Nita went over to the safe and studied it. There was no mark of violence to be seen.

"It wasn't blown or forced open. It was opened by the combination," she remarked; "no doubt about that."

A thorough examination by the men corroborated this.

"And no crook could guess or discover the combination by the feel," Morton said slowly, shaking his head. "These new modern safes are absolutely silent, no clicking of the tumblers or anything like that."

Bob Hereford turned with an awkward grin to Cliff Prentiss.

"Well, Mr. Sheriff," he said, "looks like pretty conclusive evidence. I'm ready to go down to the jail whenever you say so."

"Not just yet, Bob—for a little while, anyway," Cliff drawled. "I guess you'll be around here handy somewhere if I should want you." He pondered for a moment, then asked: "How late were you at the office?"

"We cleaned up at the boat today, you know," Hereford explained. "I got back here with the amalgam about five o'clock, as usual, and started the retort furnace with

Joe Patch to help me. About six I went for my supper, leaving Morton to watch the melt. I was gone about half an hour, and when I got back Morton went home and I stayed with Joe. We got through melting about eight-thirty and Joe went home. I locked the retort house and brought the brick in here and put it in the safe till train time in the morning. It must have been around nine, I suppose, that I finally locked the office."

"You are sure you locked the safe and locked the office?"

"Oh, yes; no question about that. I'd have to be out of my mind to overlook locking the safe after putting a gold brick in it. And the front door shuts with a snap-lock."

There was a short, heavy silence.

"Well"—Cliff stretched himself and yawned—"it's certain we can't get anywhere tonight. If you'll see Nita home, Bob, I'll give Tim a hand with poor Dad, and early in the morning I'll get several posses started out into the hills. If it's an outsider, he can't get far in the dark, and we're pretty sure to run onto some trace of him."

CHAPTER THREE

THE SECOND BULLET

CLIFF PRENTISS, having assisted Tim Reaney in transferring the body of Dad Hines to the coroner's undertaking rooms, walked slowly through the dark, deserted streets to his boarding-house. His brain was a sorely muddled maze. The night's crime in itself was sufficient to disturb him, but there were certain attendant features that perturbed him greatly.

Within his room, Cliff carefully locked the door and drew down the shade. He tossed his hat onto his bed and seated himself at his table. From his pocket he drew the object he had picked up from the floor in front of the safe. It was a revolver. On the butt were carved the initials "R. L. H."—Bob Hereford's gun! Cliff had seen it before and had instantly recognized it.

Soberly the sheriff turned the weapon over in his hands. Bob Hereford's gun—and yet Cliff felt certain that Hereford had had no more to do with the crime than he himself. Still, there was the open front door, to which but one other man besides Hereford had a key, and, most blasting fact of all, the open safe door, to which Hereford alone knew the combination.

Into Cliff's consciousness floated with obstinate persistency the impression that Morton's behavior had excited in him in the office.

"Somehow I've got a hunch that that fellow knows something. I never did like him, anyway. Too oily."

Albert Morton was a comparatively newcomer, having been in camp about eight months. Of his antecedents or previous activities nobody knew anything, he having been rather secretive about his personal affairs.

"He was too anxious about a clue," Cliff went on with his reflections. "I'd almost swear he knew about this gun." And yet the sheriff immediately realized that all this was the most indefinite sort of an impression and quite probably subconsciously induced by his previous dislike of the man.

Abstractedly Cliff broke open the gun and shook out the six cartridges. And then another shock startled him. There had been but one report and there was but one bullet hole in Hines's body—yet *two* exploded shells fell out upon the table! The puzzled frown on Cliff's wide forehead deepened. Thoughtfully he stroked his lean, tanned cheeks.

"Now what do you suppose that means?" he worried. "Folks that start out on jobs like this usually see that their guns are filled. Besides, Bob hasn't used his gun in a long while, I'm sure, and it was probably fully loaded before it started out on this little adventure. Dad Hines got one bullet, but who got the other?"

Over and over in his mind he revolved the new problem presented. The shot that had killed Hines was most certainly the last shot fired from this revolver, as the robber

had been forced to flee immediately following. The other bullet, then, must have been fired previously; but where, and at whom, and, most important, by whom?

And then, on the other hand, there might not be any significance at all attached to it. It might have been a stray shot fired at some animal or idle target. Yet the feeling persisted in Cliff's mind that such was not the case. He felt somehow that the unaccounted-for bullet had an important bearing on the affair.

At length, tired out, and knowing that a hard day's work awaited him, he slipped the cartridges back into the gun, replaced the weapon in his pocket and prepared for bed. For the time being, at least, he was determined not to divulge his clues. He knew that if they were made public he would be compelled to arrest Hereford on suspicion, and that he was loathe to do, feeling certain, as he did, that the superintendent was entirely innocent. Besides, he believed he could work more effectively by keeping his find secret.

Early in the morning he intended riding out into the hills with a posse; but in his own mind he considered this useless labor, his purpose being merely to use this activity as a blind, and to quiet any suspicions of the real criminal. Cliff Prentiss felt certain the person he sought was somewhere within the camp of Roaring Waters.

"There's no question at all but what it was a home-grown job," he reflected. "Somebody in this camp has been getting plumb ambitious and it's up to me to find out who it is."

CHAPTER FOUR

MORTON KINDLES A FIRE

THE following two days were days of seething excitement for the camp of Roaring Waters. News of the wanton killing of the town's most beloved citizen roused the townspeople to a dangerous temper, and if, in the height of this spirit, they had been able to lay hands on the murderer matters would have been likely to end unhappily for him. For two days posses had ranged the hills, but now, on the second evening following the killing, the group clustered in the drugstore was compelled to admit that further effort along that line was useless.

"Tain't no use," stated Jack Blainey, deputy sheriff; "if there was anything to be found we'd have found it by now. Either it was a town job or he got clean away the first night."

The circle of heads nodded in agreement.

A slow, sneering, sarcastic laugh drew all eyes. Albert Morton, his elbows resting on the marble-topped soda counter behind him, stood a bit aloof from the group. A cigarette hung loosely from his lips and a cold leer of contempt twisted his face.

"They can get away with pretty near anything out in this country, can't they?" he drawled.

The men eyed him in surprised expectation. For several moments they stood silent, waiting for further speech from Morton. But he volunteered nothing further, merely standing there surveying them all with his abominable grin.

Dave Cass, old and grizzled, with long gray hair and beard and wrinkled, leathery skin, took a step forward.

"We heard you, Morton," he said quietly. "And we're still listening."

The other took his cigarette from his lips, carefully flicked the ash from it and replaced it in his mouth. He shrugged his shoulders.

"What's it to me?" he demanded. "I'm a new man in this camp. I'm not indebted to Dan Hines like most of you old-timers are. He was a friend of mine, all right, but not like he was to you folks. Of course, if it had been my best friend who had been shot down like a coyote that way—but——" Again he shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

The circle of faces darkened. The fires of anger that had lain smoldering in their eyes blazed dangerously. Dave Cass's voice, however, was still cold and unmoved.

"Being as you're a newcomer here, let

me give you a tip, friend. In this here camp insinuations ain't considered real good form. When a man has any statement to make out in this country, why, he ups and makes 'em."

"There's nothing I can tell you that you don't already know yourselves," countered Morton. "You know as much about what happened as I do. I just figured you don't give a particular damn."

His slowly drawled insinuations, his skillful playing on the men's passions, his tantalizing of their lust for vengeance, had their effect. Jack Blainey pushed forward, his face aflame with anger.

"Say, Morton," he cried, "spit it out! Come on, now, what's eatin' you?"

"You've been ranging the hills for two days," Morton said, "but you haven't run onto a thing. The safe was open, and the only man that could have opened it belongs in this town."

He paused, then: "The first persons on the scene of the murder were that man's daughter and prospective son-in-law. And the sheriff of the county is this same future son-in-law."

The narrow shoulders lifted once more in suggestive disinterest.

Uneasy glances exchanged between the men in front of the speaker. They were rough, primitive folk, for the most part, living lives of rough, hard, physical endeavor, battling the grim mountains for their golden treasure. They were simple in their mental processes and in their ways of living.

Dave Cass's brow contracted.

"Those are serious accusations," he said, "without anything more to back them up."

"Back where I come from that would be considered enough for a starter, anyhow. Back there Hereford would have been in jail on suspicion the first night. What effort has Prentiss made, outside of having you fellows work yourselves to death chasing over the country looking for something that doesn't exist?"

"Well, what could he do?" one voice tentatively inquired. "There wasn't any clue to go on or to start out with?"

"How do you know?" Morton's eye shot a sudden gleam and his head jerked aggressively forward. "Prentiss was on the ground first. How do you know what he found?"

A cunning look of satisfaction crept into the face of Jack Blainey. He had been Cliff Prentiss's opponent in the contest for sheriff. A secret feeling of joy slipped into his heart at the opportunity that loomed to discredit the sheriff.

"Cliff ain't exactly broken his neck chasing things down, that's a fact." His voice made the admission more reluctantly than his heart.

"No," drawled Morton. "I'll say he hasn't. For example, did he investigate to see whether Hereford's gun is the same size as the bullet that killed Hines? Has he even asked to look at the gun to see if it's been fired recently? Those are the most primary things a sheriff would do in a case of this kind." With deep craft he turned to Blainey. "You're deputy sheriff—you know what he's done. Tell us—has he made any move?"

Blainey's hesitancy was more seeming than actual.

"No—I guess he ain't done anything very much."

Dave Cass had been listening with furrowed brow. Now he again entered the discussion.

"We old-timers have known Bob Hereford for a good many years," he said. "It's going to be hard for us to believe that he tried to rob his own company and still harder to believe that he killed old Dad Hines, one of his first friends when he came to this camp."

"Perhaps he didn't; but things certainly do look queer. Let's say he did want to pull the robbery—the only other person of his family, his daughter, was away at Cabin Center at a dance and he had the night to work in with no one to know that he wasn't home in bed all the while. When he got the safe open and was just about to grab the gold brick, Dad Hines, perhaps hearing a noise or seeing a light, comes in to investigate and sees Hereford. Of course, Hereford didn't intend to kill the old man; but after Hines caught him in front of the safe he had to kill Hines to prevent him from

talking. Now, understand, I'm not saying he did all this; but it would certainly seem to me that the possibility of his having done it ought to be investigated some."

A questioning voice among his listeners broke in:

"If Cliff Prentiss, on account of courtin' Nita, is in with Bob Hereford, why did the old man beat it when Cliff drove up, instead of waiting to finish the job?"

"How did Hereford know it was Prentiss driving up? Just as he shot Hines he heard a car drive up and stop and heard some one running up the steps of the office. Of course he'd run without waiting to see who it was."

An uneasy silence fell upon the group. There seemed no refuting Morton's assertions. Loath though they were to believe Hereford guilty of the dastardly deed, and Cliff Prentiss of complicity, or, at least, of shielding the criminal, the situation as propounded by the sneering, drawling accuser before them certainly seemed to need enlightment.

"Well——" The speaker shifted his feet uneasily. "Cliff's sheriff. I don't know as there's anything that can be done."

Morton shrugged his shoulders.

"Blainey here is deputy sheriff. If you boys went up to Hereford and demanded an explanation, and if he couldn't come clean satisfactorily, and if Prentiss refused to take action, why"—again the lift of the shoulders—"back where I come from Hereford and Prentiss would both find themselves in jail with the deputy sheriff in charge of things until the affair was properly straightened up."

Dave Cass spoke up promptly:

"This camp is a law-abiding town," he stated emphatically. "We let the law take its proper course."

"Sure. Am I suggesting anything else?" demanded Morton. "Isn't the deputy sheriff a proper legal officer? All I say is if the sheriff won't take proper action he ought to be temporarily relieved of authority. I'm not talking lynching or anything like that. I'm for the law. But right now, as near as I can figure it out, there isn't likely anything to happen. Of course, as I said, to begin with, it isn't anything very much to me personally. Dad Hines wasn't as much to me as you folks say he was to you."

Dave Cass, cautious and sober, saw in the faces of the men about him the dangerous light of an arousing mob spirit. Before the wind of opposition he feared it would blaze forth violently. The best course appeared sober guidance.

"Well, boys," he said; "you all know Bob Hereford and Cliff Prentiss as well as I do. I'm sure they can explain things satisfactorily if given a chance. Bob is probably at the office now. Let's walk up and put it up to him fair and square, like men."

A murmur of approval rippled through the crowd. They moved in a body to the door.

Morton, a smile of satisfaction on his face, trailed behind them.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHICH BLAZES BRIGHTLY

FOR two days Cliff Prentiss had ranged the hills with his posse, vainly seeking some trace of the murderer of Dad Hines. But nothing developed from this activity.

Cliff had as yet said nothing about his discovery of the gun; but he could not keep silent much longer. On the other hand, he hesitated to expose that damning bit of evidence.

Long the sheriff revolved his problem in his brain. Then he decided on a policy of directness. He repaired to the Golconda office.

Hereford spent most of his evenings at work in the office and tonight Cliff found him, as usual, behind the big paper-littered, flat-topped desk, a cigar thrust into the corner of his mouth.

The sheriff drawled a casual greeting and dropped into the chair on the opposite side of the desk. He lifted his feet to the table's edge, tilted back his chair, and commenced rolling a cigarette.

Hereford leaned back in his chair,

"Anything new?" he inquired. "Find anything today?"

Cliff completed his cigarette, placed it between his lips, and lighted it.

"No," he at length replied. "Didn't find a thing."

He puffed a few moments in silence. "Have to drop that end of it, I guess."

For a minute or two both men smoked in silence, then:

"Bob," said Cliff suddenly, "would you mind letting me see your gun?"

"Sure." Cliff's keenly alert sense caught no hesitation in the other's reply; a note of surprise at the request was there, but nothing else.

Hereford swung round to the flat-top desk behind him. He unlocked it and opened an inside drawer. His face went blank at the empty interior that gaped at him. He swung back to face Prentiss, who stood on the other side of the desk. Worried perplexity knotted his forehead.

"I've always kept my gun in that drawer," he said. "I haven't had occasion to use it in years. It was there a couple of weeks ago; I remember coming across it while hunting through my desk for some papers."

Half-heartedly he pulled out several of the other drawers and glanced within.

"It's gone," he at length announced.

Cliff thrust his hand into his pocket and drew forth the weapon. He held it on his hand and showed it to Hereford.

"Is that it?" he asked.

Bob Hereford reached quickly for the gun. He gave it but a single glance.

"It sure is!" he affirmed. "How the devil did you get it?"

"Why," said Cliff quietly, "I found it lying on the floor in front of the safe the night I found Dad Hines dead."

The older man's face paled slightly under its heavy coating of tan.

"Well," he at length said, "I guess I know what that means. I'm ready for you any time, Cliff. You've got your duty to perform and I wouldn't expect anything else."

Cliff waved a hand impatiently.

"That isn't what I'm here for," he protested. "Let's talk sense. I don't believe you put that gun there. I haven't said anything about it yet to anybody, but, of course, if nothing else shows up I'll have to produce this piece of evidence and you know what that means. It's up to us to figure out how this gun got there and who used it."

Hereford shook his head.

"I haven't the least idea," he said. "As I told you before, I saw the gun in that drawer a few weeks ago; but that's the last I did see it."

"I don't suppose it would be awfully hard for somebody to watch his chance when your desk was open and steal the gun, would it?" suggested Cliff.

"No, I suppose not."

"A fellow like Morton, for example, who is in the office all day long?"

"Well, I wouldn't want to say about Morton, specially," protested Hereford. "I never did like him much, but I wouldn't want to tie anything like this to him without more to go on."

"But it would be possible for him to get hold of your gun if he wanted to?" insisted Cliff.

"Oh, yes; he could do that all right, I guess."

There was a slight pause; then Cliff again questioned:

"Bob, do you know whether your gun was fully loaded; whether all your cartridges were full?"

"Yes, I think they were; in fact, I'm sure they were. At the time I last saw the gun, when I was going through the desk and noticed it, I took the gun out and played with it a bit. I hadn't had it out in so long I sort of fooled with it a few minutes. And I remember breaking it open and unloading it and loading it again. Yes, I'm sure it was full."

"Well," Cliff remarked, "when I came by here that night I heard only one shot; Dad Hines had only one hole in him. But when I picked that gun up from the floor it had *two* empty shells."

Bob Hereford stared bewildered at the other.

"I don't get you, Cliff," he at length said.

"I'm not sure I do myself," the sheriff grinned quizzically. "I can't figure out any meaning to it and yet I can't help but feel there's something in it. Somehow I can't quit puzzling over where that other bullet went."

Hereford shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"Might not mean a darn thing. Might be just a stray shot at a yowling cat, or something like that."

"Might be," Cliff readily admitted. "And yet, folks that steal a gun to commit robbery and murder don't usually worry much about stray cats."

Meditatively he rolled himself another cigarette.

Outside in the road sounded the murmur of voices and the crunching of gravel. Heavy boots came up the wooden steps and the next moment the little room was filled with men, some shuffling awkwardly towards the rear, others pressing forward with belligerent grimness in their faces.

At the first sound of their approach Cliff had snatched the gun up from where it had been lying, on the table between himself and Hereford, and swept it into his pocket. He looked up at the grouped faces before him in surprise.

"Hello, boys," he greeted. "What's up? Why all the excitement?"

Morton, standing unobtrusively in the rear, whispered significantly to his neighbor:

"Both of them pow-wowing together up here, see? Certainly doesn't look good to me."

Several seconds later the whispered insinuation was being repeated in the front rank.

Dave Cass, by tacit understanding, stepped forward to the task of spokesman.

"Cliff," he said, "it's two days now since this camp's best friend was killed and there ain't been nothing done yet in the way of squarin' things up for him."

"You know what's been going on, Dave," replied Cliff. His keen eyes studied the group; they did not fail to observe Morton slinking behind the others. "You know we've been riding the country roundabout here hunting for something to give us a lead."

"Some of the boys feel," Dave returned, steadily eyeing the other, "that there's more to be found right here in camp than outside in the hills."

Cliff shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps so," he acquiesced. "But if anybody knows something or can give me any sort of information I'll sure be plumb tickled to receive it."

Dave Cass turned to Hereford.

"Bob," he started, his voice even and low, "we're all your friends, and you know it. We've known you, some of us, for a good many years and we know you for an honest, square, decent citizen. But"—he paused—"but you're the only man that knows the combination to that safe, according to your own statement; when Dad Hines was found dead that safe was found open. Some of the boys don't know you as well as older men. Can you give us any explanation of that open safe that might make them feel a bit more certain about you?"

Bob Hereford's face turned dark with anger.

"Dave Cass," he said, "we've got in this county a properly elected sheriff and other officials for the handling of such matters. I resent a mob like this coming up to question me, and I'll see you all in hell before I'll give you the satisfaction of any answer! I'm ready and willing to give any information I can to the proper authorities. Nobody is more anxious than I am to see the murderer of Dad Hines get what's coming to him."

A murmur passed through the crowd. The sheriff's taut senses caught the whisper, progressing from the rear of the crowd to the front: "Pretty damn keen on leaving it all up to the sheriff!"

Cass turned to Cliff.

"Cliff," he said gravely, "you've heard Bob put it squarely up to you as sheriff. What explanation has he given you on the safe being open?"

"Dave," Cliff answered, and there was a hard glint of anger in his tones, "as long as I'm sheriff of this county I'll handle this case as seems best to me. If you boys don't

like the way I handle it—why, you can say so next election day. But to-day I'm sheriff of Golden County!"

A swarthy, heavy browed miner broke through from the rear of the crowd. Art Franks, always in the center of any turmoil or disruption, had been absorbing Morton's softly murmured comments on the proceedings.

"To the devil with all this damned bunk!" he snorted. "We're here to get action, and, by God, we're going to get it! You say you're sheriff; well, what have you done? You've run us all ragged chasing over the hills, when all the signs point to it being a home job. All the dope sure looks queer for Hereford; but have you done anything along that line? Has he explained that safe? Dad was killed with a .45 bullet; have you examined Hereford's gun?"

"I refuse to discuss the matter," Cliff answered. His gaze met steadily the other man's glowing eyes.

Albert Morton came through the crowd to the front.

"Boys," he addressed them, "Mr. Hereford isn't the only man open to suspicion. I realize that you have reason to suspect me, too. I've got a key to the office just the same as Mr. Hereford, although, of course, I don't know the safe combination. I want to clear myself as much as possible; here's my gun for you to look at. You can see, it's a .38."

He held out in the palm of his hand his revolver. Dave Cass took it from him and examined it.

"It's a .38," he confirmed. "Don't look like it's been fired very recently," he supplemented.

He handed the weapon back to its owner and turned to Hereford.

"Better let us look at your gun, Bob," he advised. He leaned forward and in a lower tone, as if not wishing the rest to hear, he added: "Some of the boys is a bit impatient, Bob. Better let 'em see the gun."

The crowd had pressed a bit closer. The air had tensed and an ominous grimness tightened the men's jaws.

"Come on—dig up the gun!" Art Franks demanded and a number of voices growled a threatening echo.

There was a moment of silence. Cliff Prentiss caught the dangerous under-current in the men's temper. He decided the only chance was bold directness, relying on the men's general sense of fair play.

"Here's the gun," he quietly announced and drew the weapon from his pocket. "It's a .45, exactly the same as about seventy-five percent of the guns the rest of you fellows carry."

Franks, behind whom Morton had stepped after displaying his revolver, spoke up again, suspiciously:

"How do you happen to be carrying Hereford's gun in your pocket, sheriff? Where did you find it?"

Cliff caught the phrase "find it"; his alert eyes noted Morton's position behind the speaker. The phrasing of the question might have a significance, and then, again, might not.

Before he could answer Bob Hereford rose to his feet. His clenched fists crashed on the table. The anger that had been mounting within him now blazed forth in uncontrollable rage.

"I'll tell you where he found it!" he shouted. "He found it on that floor, in front of that safe, at the same time he found Dad Hines's dead body! Now, damn you, what have you got to say about that?"

A startled hush hung for an instant over the astonished crowd. It was broken by a loud jeering laugh from Franks.

"With evidence like that," he snorted, "you've been chasing us around the hills! You've kept that gun in your pocket for two days and wouldn't have produced it now if we hadn't forced you to. Looks to me like we need a new sheriff mighty pronto!'

"That looks pretty serious, Bob, Dave Cass spoke up, "especially taken together with the safe combination and everything. Can't you give any sort of explanation that might make things look better?" His voice was troubled and eagerly pleading.

"If I could explain them, would I stand here arguing with you fellows? If I could explain them, somebody would be decorat-

ing a telegraph pole by now. There are the facts! Beyond them you know as much as I do."

"Then put him in jail to see if he can't dig up a few more facts!" cried Franks. "And put his chummy little sheriff in jail with him and maybe we can learn a few facts ourselves on the outside! Come on, Jack!" he called to Blainey. "You're deputy sheriff!"

Jack Blainey stepped hesitatingly forward.

"On what authority does a deputy arrest his chief?" Cliff drawled quizzically.

"On this authority!' snapped Franks, and a revolver muzzle pointed ominously at the sheriff's heart.

Cass stepped forward in hasty dismay.

"I guess, Cliff, it would be better to do what the boys want. You'll admit the evidence looks pretty bad on the face of it, enough to warrant arresting you on suspicion. If things clear up and proper explanations are found, why, you know the boys will be only too glad to apologize for having been rough. But you know how they all feel about Dad Hines."

Light footsteps sprang up the steps without. The next instant Nita's slim, lithe figure stepped into the room. She stopped in amazement at the scene.

"Why, I thought I'd run up to see when you were coming home, dad," she explained. "What's all this? What's going on?"

She sensed the hostile air in the grouped men, then noted the gun pointed at her fiancé. She sprang to his side.

In slow, grave words Dave Cass explained the situation.

"You see, Nita," he finished, "if they're innocent—and I'm sure they are—there ain't no harm in their being in jail a few days."

"And they'd better come quiet and peaceful," Franks broke in roughly, "because we're going to see they get there."

Nita's wide, blue eyes surveyed the threatening group before her. She saw in their eyes more terrible things than jail should their will be resisted. She turned to her father and Cliff.

"Go with them," she pleaded; "it will only be for a short time. I know you're innocent and we'll prove it. But until then go with them."

A moment Cliff hesitated. It went sorely against the grain to submit to Franks's bullying coercion. But he, too, saw what lay in the men's eyes.

"All right," he said. "Come on, Bob. It won't be for long. We'll cram all this down their throats yet."

CHAPTER SIX

NITA GETS INTO ACTION

ROARING WATERS'S jail, located in the basement of the new county courthouse, consisted of one large room, divided through the center by a steel bar partition.

Next morning Nita was admitted to the visitors' section of the room by Peg-Leg Mike, the courthouse janitor, who also served as warden of the jail. She rushed forward and, through the forbidding paling, pressed her lips against those of her father and her sweetheart, occupying twin cells.

"This is terrible!" Nita cried. "To think that you two——"

"Shucks!" Cliff grinned cheerfully. "Don't let this worry you. We'll be out of here soon enough. We needed a rest, anyhow. We've been working too hard lately—eh, Bob?"

"When I take a vacation I won't choose a jail!" growled Bob Hereford. "Wait till I get out of here!"

The three were alone. Peg-Leg, after admitting Nita, had locked the door and stumped away on his wooden leg to the performance of his other duties.

"We've got to get busy, that's a cinch," declared Cliff. "Some things look awful rotten for us and it'll take some keen sleuth work to dig up the facts."

"The first thing to do," Hereford said, "is for Nita to telephone to Denver for a first-class lawyer and a first-class detective."

"You're right," agreed Cliff. "If she phones this morning they can come up on tomorrow's train and be here in the after-

noon. And I've got a good hunch as to where they can start first in their investigations."

"Then you know a darn sight more than I do," Hereford growled gloomily. "I give it up; it's too much for me. With all that evidence I'm sort of beginning to believe myself that maybe I did it."

"Listen," the younger man explained eagerly. "If that bird Morton didn't have anything to do with this job then I'm a pink-nosed kangaroo!"

"I don't know," Hereford said. "I don't like Morton, but, just the same, I can't quite figure him in this deal."

"Listen to me," Cliff persisted. "I may be crazy, but that night I had a sort of feeling when Morton examined the office that he was looking for something specific, that he knew there was something there he ought to find. When that crowd came up to the office last night Morton was with them, and I'll bet that he was the bright boy that put the notion into their heads to start questioning you about your gun. And you noticed how eager he was to shove his own pretty little .38 forward for them to examine, just so as to hustle the investigation along to the point where it became dogged embarrassing for us? He had every opportunity to pull the job. He lives all by himself in that little shack not a quarter of a mile from the office, and he could slip back and forth without anybody noticing him."

"That still is all a long ways from being real evidence, evidence sufficient to force him to trade places with us," Hereford answered.

"Sure; I know that isn't evidence. But if we get a good man on the job, with that for a starter he ought to be able to get at the real bottom truth of the affair."

"All of that still doesn't touch the question of the second bullet."

"The second bullet?" queried Nita.

Cliff told her what he had found on examining her father's gun.

"I'm satisfied," he went on, "that that extra bullet has something to do with this proposition. Your dad knows his gun was fully loaded; we find it with two empty shells, and Dad Hines stopped only one of those bullets. Maybe there's nothing to it, and then, again, maybe there is."

"Well," Hereford said, "it certainly is a case for a detective. Nita, you'd better go and phone right away, to be sure and get somebody here tomorrow."

He gave the girl the name of a lawyer, a close friend of his.

"He'll know of a good detective to bring with him," he said.

Nita rang the bell for Peg-Leg. The janitor-warden stumped up to the door, unlocked it and permitted her to leave, relocking the door and returning to his workroom.

Nita, with bowed head, hurried home. She was painfully conscious of the curious stares that followed her from people who but the day before had greeted her with the utmost cordiality.

She telephoned to Denver and obtained the lawyer's promise to leave for Roaring Waters on the following morning's train, bringing a detective with him. Then she flung herself on her bed in a fit of desperate sobbing.

The preceeding night had been sleepless, and as Nita's fit of sobbing wore itself out she fell into a heavy slumber.

It was late afternoon when she awoke. The rash resolve to search Morton's bachelor shack had leaped into her head. It seemed a foolish notion, one that could surely be productive of no information of any value. But Nita was desperately grasping at every straw of hope; she might find some letters or papers that would give some hint as to Morton's activities prior to coming to Roaring Waters that might prove of value. At any rate, Nita was suspicious of the man.

She slipped out of the house and sped along the rough, narrow foot trail leading towards the mountains, avoiding the more roundabout, open road.

The shack in which Morton lived alone was a rather dilapidated, untrimmed log cabin, isolated from the rest of the town, situated on a side road, back from the main stream of travel. Almost directly behind it the mountains lifted their dark green slopes

to towering heights, topped with snowy caps.

Nita, arriving unobserved at the shack, tried the front and rear doors. They were locked, as she had expected, but the common pass key on her own key ring easily opened the simple lock of the back door and she slipped into the cabin's single room.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE CABIN'S SECRETS

NITA looked around at the scantily furnished room. A blanket-covered cot stood in one corner and beside it a trunk; against the opposite wall stood a small stove; a pine table, a few chairs and an old-fashioned wash-stand, the varnish of which had long since been worn off, constituted the balance of the furniture.

With hands trembling from nervousness and excitement Nita pulled out the top drawer of the wash-stand. But nothing revealed itself other than collars and socks and similar commonplace articles of masculine attire. One by one she explored the other drawers, but with equal lack of result.

Disappointed, she turned towards the trunk; after all, she reflected, any letters or papers that Morton might have would be more likely to be hidden in the trunk than in the wash-stand drawers.

As she started across the room a dark stain on the uncarpeted floor arrested her roving eye. She knelt to examine the stand, and a thrill shot through her. The dark, rusty, brownish-red splotch was unmistakably the stain of dried blood. Nita examined it minutely. The mark was thoroughly dry; just how old it was Nita, of course, was too inexpert to determine. But that it was blood she felt certain.

She peered eagerly about the room. Her original purpose of searching for letters was utterly forgotten. She appeared now to be on the scent of something far more vital. Several more spots of blood showed themselves between the main splotch and the back door; but that was all that appeared.

At sight of the stain the thought of murder flashed through Nita's mind. But she racked her brain vainly in an effort to discover who the victim might be. No one was missing from the camp; there had been no mysterious disappearances recently. Dad Hines had been killed in the Golconda offices and his body had been removed immediately by the coroner.

Nita studied the kitchen floor, inch by inch, to see whether any of the boards showed signs of having been disturbed recently. She recalled the many cases she had read of murdered bodies being so buried. The floor, though, showed unbroken, the dirt-filled cracks between the boards having obviously not been disturbed for many years.

Finally the girl rose to her feet and went to the back door. She looked out. A few yards distant from the cabin stood a weather-beaten shed. Scattered carelessly about the adjacent ground were a saw horse, chopping block, axe, water bucket and other similar miscellany. Beyond the shed the pines crowded down in a thick, green circle, one narrow trail breaking through them, winding steeply up the mountain's slope.

The girl stepped over to the shed. Perhaps it was here that she would find the answer to the mystery. The sight of the heavy padlock on the door set her heart to palpitating in high hopes. Why such precautions to guard the contents of a common shed?

Against this lock all Nita's keys proved valueless. The heavy brass padlock resisted all her efforts. The hasp, too, being bolted on the inside, offered no chance of securing admittance.

Nita prowled around the shed, vainly searching for a vulnerable spot. But short of forcing an admittance there was no way of entering. The only window was a small square of glass set high in the wall.

The girl pulled up the saw horse, climbed upon it and peered into the interior of the

shed. As her eyes adjusted themselves to the interior darkness she discerned dimly the ordinary scattered collection of shed rubbish and, in one corner, erect, exuding a spirit of alert readiness for instant action, stood a shiny motorcycle! A few seconds Nita gazed in breathless astonishment; then, her limbs trembling with excitement, she crept down from her perch. The splotch of blood on the cabin floor, indicative of foul play, and this hidden motorcycle, crying aloud its function of speedy, secret flight!

How the motorcycle had gotten there was a further mystery to Nita. Morton, she was sure, had never divulged his ownership of any such article; nor could he have received such an object through the regular freight or express channels without the fact becoming common knowledge in the town.

Seething with excitement, Nita now applied herself in deadly earnest to the uncovering of further information. If she could but locate the body of the person whose blood dyed Morton's floor.

Her eyes burning with the intensity of her eagerness, Nita roved the confines of the small, pine-rimmed yard. A streaming wisp of coarse gunny sacking caught on a tree twig halted her attention. The tree from which the coarse string hung stood at the very entrance of the path leading up the mountainside. Burlap strings are not usually found attached to pine trees on mountain slopes. But it was something far more significant than that which sent a thrill through the girl. Part of the string was stained a dark red.

Nita's wildly racing brain traced and retraced the winding trail of circumstances she had stumbled upon. In a flash the situation became clear to her. The burlap thread hung from the tree at about the height of a man's shoulder. The dead body, she surmised, had been thrown into a gunny sack and borne off on the murderer's shoulder up this mountain trail.

Her feet leaped forward to follow this new scent.

The path wound steeply upward. It was narrow, the trees crowding close from either side, and at frequent intervals the telltale wisps of burlap pointed the way.

At length Nita reached the end of the trail, a little plateau overlooking a yawning chasm, a thousand feet deep. The snow at the bottom of that crevasse never disappeared and no man had ever descended the almost perpendicular wall to explore that lake of eerily gleaming white.

Nita, hot and tired from her climb, aglow with the excitement of the search, threw herself onto the ground and gazed across the chasm at the purplish-bluish slopes on the other side. Her eyes wandered down to the silent sea of snow at the bottom. She shuddered. This was undoubtedly the disposition made of his victim's body by the murderer. And as to the indentity of the assassin she had no doubt. The unaccounted bullet shot from her father's gun, the blood splotch on the cabin floor, the trail of blood-stained burlap threads, the secret motorcycle ready for instant flight, all constituted links in a terrible chain. But one link seemed still missing: who could the murdered man be? Rack her brain as she might, the girl could find no answer to that query. And, her brow wrinkled in worried puzzlement, what connection, if any, did all this have with the attempted robbery and the killing of Dad Hines?

For a while Nita lay there, resting her physical person while her brain strained its every atom to solve the problem.

At length she rose and retraced her steps. Her feelings were mingled elation at what she had discovered and disappointment at not being able to complete the circle.

The passage of time had been unnoticed by Nita. The sun was hanging low over the horizon when she reached the cabin. Loath to depart without attempting further to probe the mystery, she re-entered the shack. Perhaps she might find some object that may have been dropped by the murdered man.

She slipped to her knees and explored the floor, delving into every crevice. But she found nothing.

Then, as she knelt disappointedly in the middle of the floor, her figure stiffened in terror. The crunching of footsteps sounded

on the gravel without. The next moment the front door was unlocked and Albert Morton stepped into the room.

At sight of the girl on the floor by the blood stain he started back. Then a look of crafty suspicion twisted his face.

"Well," he greeted, stepping forward; "didn't know I had a caller."

With the shock of his entrance the realization of the lateness of the hour had swept over Nita. Morton had evidently gone from the office down to the boarding house for his supper and had then come to his cabin—to find her.

She rose stiffly to her feet. She edged towards the rear door, but he forestalled her purpose. Unobtrusively, yet surely, he slipped around till he stood close before her, she standing back against the table. Nita's eyes darted desperately about her. But she was trapped. No plausible explanation of her presence rose to her harried brain. She decided on a desperate bold attack.

She pointed her finger at the stain on the floor.

"I accuse you," she cried, "of——"

She got no further. With a snarl Morton leaped at her throat.

It was a fierce struggle that Nita made. She was an outdoor girl and her short khaki skirt and loose khaki blouse permitted her free movement of her body and limbs. She was no match, however, for the man. His fingers crept around her throat. Back, back, he forced her, gasping, across the table.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EXIT IN HASTE

JACK BLAINEY, glorying in the newfound importance of his accession to the post of acting sheriff, leaned against the cigar counter in the drugstore, a cigarette between his lips. In the nearly twenty-four hours that had elapsed since his displacement of Cliff Prentiss he had accomplished nothing of any apparent value.

Tommy, the drug clerk, came in just then.

"Jack," he announced, "they just phoned for you from the hotel. The President of the Golconda just got in on train No. 17, and wants to see you up at his room."

Blainey hitched up his belt, jerked the kotted tie about his khaki shirt collar, and with an air of heavy importance passed out of the store. He climbed into his Ford car and drove down to the two-story frame hotel in the next block.

The door to which the hotel clerk directed Blainey was opened at his knock by a small, gray, keen-eyed, elderly man.

"I'm Mr. Chickering," the stranger introduced himself to Blainey, "President of the Golconda Gold Dredging Company. Mr. Hereford wired me of the terrible occurrence last Tuesday night and I left Chicago at once.

He motioned the other to a chair, offered Jack a cigar and seated himself.

"When I reached here," he continued, "I learned that my superintendent is in jail charged with a crime, and your sheriff is likewise imprisoned, charged, I believe, with being an accomplice, or something of that sort. I should like to hear the details."

Fully and elaborately Blainey particularized the circumstances that pointed to Bob Hereford's guilt.

Mr. Chickering listened with a concentrated frown on his forehead.

"Looks bad for him," he admitted, "and yet——" He got up and paced back and forth across the room. "Mr. Hereford has been with us a good many years, and we have always had the highest confidence in him. It is true, the past year or so we have received intimations that it might be well to investigate things a bit, and this affair happening on top of that—— Where can we find Mr. Morton?" he demanded abruptly.

"He's probably at his shack," Blainey said. "I can drive you up, if you'd like."

Chickering nodded and followed Blainey to the latter's car.

The mellowness of evening was settling over the little town as they drove through

the streets. The sun had just dropped behind the mountains and the soft haze of approaching night was crowding down into the valley.

Blainey turned into the side trail that led to Morton's cabin. As they jerked around in front of the shack the head-lights for an instant flashed through the uncurtained window. With a sharp, startled cry Blainey jammed on his brakes and leaped from the car. Chickering, who likewise looked into the cabin, followed. They flung open the door and dashed within.

Morton at their entrance leaped back from the table. Nita, gasping, twisting painfully her sore neck, straightened up.

The two intruders stepped forward into the center of the room. Morton slunk warily away. He edged with slow stealth around opposite the door that had been left flung open at the other two men's entrance.

"What's up, Morton?" demanded Blainey. "What's going on here?"

Nita had by this time recovered her breath. She pointed her finger accusingly at Morton.

"Arrest him!" she cried. "He's guilty of murder! I can prove it!"

A swift dash and Morton had dived past Blainey through the open door and leaped into the Ford standing in front of the house. Blainey, after glancing through the window, had jammed on his brakes and jumped out over the side without stopping to kill his engine. Now Morton threw off the brakes, and before the astonished group within the cabin could collect their wits he was tearing down the roadway, his wheels churning up a cloud of dust.

The three within the shack stood stunned. Then Nita snatched the gun-butt protruding from Blainey's hip pocket and thrust the weapon into her blouse. She dashed through the back door, caught up the ax and swung it against the shed door. A few furious blows and the boards shattered. She rushed within, grasped the motorcycle and pushed it outside. The next instant, astride the saddle in her short skirt, she was streaking through the deepening darkness behind Morton.

CHAPTER NINE

THE CHASE THROUGH THE NIGHT.

AS Nita bent over the handlebars of the motorcycle her first thought was of the gasoline tank. But she felt reasonably sure that the tank was full. Morton, holding the motorcycle in readiness for his own flight, would undoubtedly have kept the fuel supply well up. So she bent lower over the bars and twisted the gas lever.

She dared not open it too wide. Although familiar with a motorcycle, it was some time since she had ridden one, and until she got the "feel" of it she was forced to hold her speed down, although she knew it meant Morton increasing his lead.

The fugitive, doubling back on a cross side trail, and then striking the main highway, headed away from town towards the mountains. By the time the canyon was entered night had fallen, and the perilously twisting road wound through an inky sea. Nita's spot-light one instant would be shooting out over the edge of the road, illuminating the mountain wall on the far side of the canyon, and the next moment it was throwing into glaring prominence the rocks and trees at her very elbow. Above the Gargantuan chattering of her engine the roaring river rumbled in a menacing overtone.

How far ahead Morton was Nita could not tell. She did not know whether she was gaining on him or losing ground. She could merely stretch herself along the frame of her mount and, as she caught the "feel" of the machine, grimly twist the gasoline lever and plunge through the blackness of the night.

How long this continued Nita could never tell. But at length on the far side of a wide horseshoe curve she caught a momentary glimpse of an automobile's lights. Her heart leaped exultantly as she was sure it was Morton's car. Apparently she was gaining on him. She opened the throttle another notch. Several times more she caught flashes of his headlights; then she began to catch occasional glimpses of his tail light as she crept closer and closer.

Again she came to a wide horseshoe bend. Morton's headlights, half-way around the curve, swept steadily along.

And then suddenly a cry of horror leaped from Nita's lips. The spasmodic shudder that racked her nearly wrenched the machine from the roadway. Morton's lights had suddenly slashed a crazy pattern in the blackness of the night; had even, for an infinitesimal fraction of a second, swung around and blinded her own eyes; had then plunged dizzily over the edge into the chasm.

What Nita had subconsciously feared had come to pass: Morton, comparatively ignorant of this country, not skilled in driving over these tortuous mountain roads, had at last committed a fatal fault.

Nita tore around the curve to the spot where Morton had plunged off the trail. A culvert crossing the road told the story.

Nita dismounted and peered over the edge. All was ominously dark and silent below. She unclamped the spot-light from her handlebars and held it the length of its cord over the edge. Far below a barely discernible dark heap showed among the boulders.

Nita braced the spot-light with rocks and by its light commenced to descend. Trained mountaineer though she was, it taxed all her skill and strength to descend the steep wall. Hanging desperately by trees, rocks, roots, sliding in the loose top soil and starting avalanches that threatened to carry her with them, and which, when they had passed, left her gasping in the dust that followed them, she at length reached the bottom.

She ran up to the crumpled pile of wood, metal and leather that had once been a Ford car. Beside it lay the inert figure of Albert Morton. The rays of the spot-light far above reached feebly, but by their faint glow Nita could see that Morton was deathly white. The ground about him was sodden and damp, and his clothes were dyed crimson.

Nita knelt by him and placed her hand over his heart. There was the faintest beat still discernible. At her touch the man's lashes fluttered open. He looked into her eyes.

"I'm glad you've come," he murmured feebly. "I'm done for—another few minutes—got to talk fast—listen. I want to tell you—before——"

She listened to his confession eagerly, wrote it in her pocket memorandum book and he signed it. Then she climbed to the road, mounted the motorcycle and sped away like the wind. But the reaction had been too much for her. A dizzy feeling kept creeping over her, and she suddenly collapsed and fell from the machine.

CHAPTER TEN

MORTON'S CONFESSION

NITA slowly opened her eyes. Bewildered, she gazed around. She was lying in her bed at home. Hazily she noticed faces grouped about her recumbent figure.

She closed her eyes again. Gradually events came back to her mind. She recalled the wild ride through the night, the sickening drop of Morton's car, her descent to his side and his confession, her painful, perilous scramble back to the road, and the commencement of the trip homeward. She recalled meeting, after a few minutes' ride, Jack Blainey and several auto loads of men from Roaring Waters, hot in pursuit, and that was all she did remember.

She again opened her eyes. This time the faces of her callers were clearer. With a cry of joy she saw her father and Cliff. Behind them stood Jack Blainey and the stranger that had been with him when he had burst into Morton's cabin. At the other side of the bed sat Doctor Byers.

"I'm afraid things have gotten away from me," she laughed weakly as she sat up.

"You fainted dead away," said Blainey. "We brought you home and this is the first you've opened your eyes."

"Too much excitement for me, I guess," Nita laughed. "When were dad and Cliff freed?"

"When I found Morton trying to choke

you to death, and when he lit out I sort of began to figure that maybe we'd been a bit too prompt in our opinion. We had to beat it to town and rustle up some cars and men and start out after you and him; but when we got back I had your dad and Cliff let out of jail."

"Let us do some questioning now, young lady. We're mighty anxious to learn what happened. You remember, we don't know a thing yet. Some of the cars kept right on after we met you, to catch Morton, if they could. We haven't heard from them yet."

"Take it easy," cautioned the doctor. "You may talk, but don't exert yourself too much, and if you feel yourself getting tired you had better stop."

"Oh, I'm feeling fine now," Nita assured him brightly. She propped herself against her pillows. "They won't find Morton," she added soberly. "He's lying at the bottom of the canyon—dead!"

She swiftly related the story of the chase and its grim ending.

"Did he say anything before he died?" anxiously asked Cliff.

She took the book from her pocket.

"Yes; he made a complete confession; I wrote it and he signed it. Here it is."

She handed the book containing the confession to the deputy sheriff.

"He admitted that he attempted to rob the safe and killed Dad Hines," she went on. "He had laid his plans very carefully in every detail. Of course he had not expected to have to kill poor old Hines, but he had intended from the very beginning to throw suspicion for the robbery on dad."

She explained what she had found on examining Morton's cabin.

"Taking all those things together," she went on, "the unaccounted-for bullet, the splotch of blood, the trail of burlap strings to the precipice—I, of course, at once jumped at the conclusion that somebody had been murdered. But those things were all cunning, artificially manufactured evidence. After stealing dad's gun Morton admitted he had simply fired a shot from it; he had cut his arm to obtain the blood for the floor stain, and he distributed the strings of sacking along the trail. The motorcycle he had had shipped to himself from Denver in separate parts, at different times, boxed and labeled under false descriptions so that nobody should know he owned any means of travel. His idea was to steal the gold brick that night, leave dad's gun lying on the floor, and then escape by means of his motorcycle. He timed it so that everybody would be back from the dance at Cabin Center and he would have a free road. When the robbery was discovered dad's gun would be found with an empty shell; Morton would be missing and an examination of his cabin would show clear evidence of his having been killed and his body thrown over the precipice. The natural supposition would be that dad, fearing Morton suspected his purpose, had killed him and then had stolen and hidden the gold. After Dad Hines interrupted Morton he still intended to go through with his scheme; but when Cliff and I arrived he had to give it up, although he dropped dad's gun to throw suspicion on him."

Tired, she sank back against the pillows. Her eyes closed for a moment. Then she again sat up.

"But one thing still puzzles me," she said. "He didn't get to explain how he learned the safe combination."

There were several moments of puzzled silence; then suddenly Mr. Chickering spoke up.

"I think I can explain that," he said. "Morton was a clerk in our home office in Chicago before he came out here." He smiled at Bob Hereford's look of amazement.

"For some little while," Chickering continued, "we had been getting rumors and hints that all was not well in Roaring Waters. Morton claimed that he was receiving such suggestions from roundabout sources, and we received similar hints, which I can now understand were undoubtedly inspired by Morton. At length he persuaded us to let him come out here and see what he could discover; so we transferred Jamieson, your former chief clerk, to Cal-

lfornia and sent Morton to take his place without your knowing where he came from. The combination to your safe is kept in my office, and although we are careful to keep such things locked up, we don't consider extraordinary precautions necessary, being located such a distance from the operations. Morton, in all the time he was in our office, undoubtedly learned the combination. It is very evident he planned this affair long ago." A whistle of amazement came from the men.

"He certainly did cook up a good plot," murmured Cliff, in awed astonishment. "And nearly got away with it, too."

Then he turned to Nita, lying back on her pillows.

"Your detective work certainly saved your old dad and me," he enthused. "You are some plucky little girl, I'll tell the world."

The men caught each other's eyes, grinned, and slipped quietly out of the room, leaving the sweethearts alone.

DAPPER DON FACING PRISON

"DAPPER DON" COLLINS, fugitive from the law, whose real name is said to be Arthur Tourbillon, was indicted in Bronx County in May, 1921, for shooting John H. Reid, a salesman, after a quarrel in the home of Mrs. Hazel D. Warner, in the Bronx. Reid, who was shot five times, recovered after weeks in a hospital and Collins disappeared. He has an unserved Sing Sing sentence awaiting him and is under indictment in Philadelphia on a liquor running charge.

Collins made his way to Europe and settled in Paris, where he promptly fell in love with an American girl. But he was arrested and held pending extradition. The beautiful 22-year-old wealthy divorcee who returned his love, after making formal request to French police authorities for permission to marry "Dapper Don" Collins, alias Harry Hussey, has abandoned the project—for the time being at least.

Her decision came as the result of her sweetheart's own pleading in a remarkable letter received by her written in La Sante jail. "Dapper Don" makes the sacrifice of his love in the following dramatic passages:

"As for your marrying me, sweetheart, think it over seriously first and you may change your mind. I personally think you would be very foolish. You can do so much better. I am ruined from every angle and have a prison sentence before me. When I come out I will be of little use to anybody, and what use would I be to you after prison? When I would come out I would be broken in health and a burden on society, and I know you don't want that.

"You are still young and have the world before you, with many opportunities if you keep your head up. You will be a million times better off by not marrying me and by forgetting such a miserable creature ever existed. So think it over and understand I haven't forsaken and will never forsake you; I love you more than my liberty or anything else and my consideration of you and your welfare is the reason I am writing.

"Please be careful, dear heart. Do you know I didn't recognize you yesterday until you called me, and then I was so surprised I was almost speechless. I would have given the world to have picked you up in my arms and hugged and kissed you. You looked so thin and pitiful—I had all I could do to stop the tears.

"Don't let anything worry you, darling. All my love to you. ARTHUR."

The girl since her removal from the American Hospital at Neuilly, where she has nursed since the new year, is staying in a small hotel near the Opera. She said she would reluctantly abide by Hussey's advice.

"I love him. I always will," she said. "There is not one man in a million who would act so nobly. However, if he thinks it a mistake for me to marry him, I will try to meet his sacrifice with sacrifice."

The Rent in the Warp

By CRITTENDEN MARRIOTT

BULLITT'S interest in crime was only vicarious; never had even one of its residents been haled before the bar of its court for anything worse than an overdose of drink. So when Jim Gordon was arrested for the murder of Postmaster Bates the interest soared to fever height.

It became even more absorbing when Judy was drawn into it. Judy had been the nurse, and had become the maid-of all-work of Nelly Page. She was well over sixty years of age, very black, and a strong believer in direct action; that is to say, believed, to borrow a phrase from the back of the dictonary, in *suaviter in modo* and *fortiter in re,* with especial emphasis on the *fortiter.* So when Jim Gordon, who was engaged to Judy's "Miss Nelly," got into the money trouble that culminated in his arrest for murder, Judy went into action.

Bullitt was a village rather than the small town it tried to be. The main event of the day (between court sessions) was the coming of the eight o'clock train that brought the evening mail from the city and brought back any home residents who had adventured a-field in the morning.

The train, as usual, was late; but it got in at last. Jim Gordon was on it. He had, as everybody knew, gone to town to try to raise money to save his farm, and a good many of his friends were waiting for his return, hoping against hope that he had been successful. It took only one glimpse of his face to show that he had not.

Nobody said anything to him about the money, but a good many people clapped him on the back and said something or other that was none the less cheering because it was so obviously forced. Finally they all followed Mr. Bates, the postmaster, as he carried the one mail sack into the post-office and dumped its contents on the counter, so as to more easily distribute them to the boxes.

On the top of the heap of miscelleneous matter rested a registered package which "everybody" promptly recognized as containing the cash, about two thousand dollars, for the payroll of the local force of the Interurban Trolley and Electric Power Company, which was situated at "The Falls," a couple of miles out of town. Several of the loiterers bandied ancient jests about the money as Bates picked up the package and put it into the safe.

Jim Gordon got no mail. He left the post-office and walked over to the railway station, nearly opposite, with Tillman, the station agent, who slept over the ticket office. "Everybody" knew that he was trying to get a loan and was feeling very sure that he would not succeed. Half an hour later he started home on foot. The trolley cars ran by his house (the next one beyond that of Judy's mistress, Miss Nelly Page, but no car was due for an hour, and he did not care to wait.

Later that night, Bates, who roomed in a house just back of the post-office, was awakened by a noise and, going to the window, saw some one breaking in at the back door of the post-office. Snatching up a pistol, he ran downstairs, across to the post-office, and shot at the burglar. The burglar fired back, dropping Bates, and then ran out of the office and across the railway tracks. Tillman, the railway ticket agent, who had been aroused by the shots, later claimed that he saw him clearly.

Tillman, however, admitted that he made no attempt to follow the man. Instead, he

ran over to the post-office and found Bates dying. Other men arrived in time to see Tillman holding Bates in his arms and begging him to say who shot him. Bates said: "He looked like Jim Gordon!" Just then the electric lights went out for a minute and in the darkness Tillman said: "My God! That's who I saw crossing the track." When the lights came on again, Tillman, who had pulled out his watch, said: "It's nine-forty! Bates was shot close to ten minutes ago and Jim left me to go home fifteen minutes before that." Another man picked up a knife from the floor close to some slashed wrappings, which turned out to belong to the payroll money package, and asked: "Ain't this Jim's knife?" And it was!

A self-constituted posse of men caught a trolley car for Jim's house, waked him up, and questioned him, without telling him anything about Bates's murder. He told them that he reckoned he had got home about ten o'clock, but couldn't say for sure, because he hadn't looked at his watch. If they really wanted to know maybe Joe Creswell or Madison Allen could tell them, for he had met the two of them just outside the Page house close by.

Somebody brought the two men—woke them up, just as they had Jim—and they said, yes, they had met Jim at about ten o'clock, they reckoned, but they couldn't say for sure, because they weren't toting any watches.

At last the posse told Jim about the murder and that Bates had said the man looked like him. And they told him that Tillman had showed his watch and that it said 9:40, and that it was surely right because it kept time for the railroad and had to be right; and that twenty or maybe thirty minutes would be plenty of time for Jim to get home, which would make it about ten o'clock, just as he and Joe and Madison had said, and so they reckoned he'd have to come to town with them.

Some of the men stayed behind and searched the house for the payroll money. They did not find it, but this surprised nobody very much, for as everybody said to everybody, "Only a darned fool would hide the money in the first place that anybody'd look for it right off."

As the searchers passed Colonel Page's house on the way back to town, they found black Judy was hanging over the gate.

"Evenin', Massa Andrew, suh," she greeted the leader. "It's a mighty nice night for walkin'. Kinder late, though!"

The men stopped and stared at Judy hesitatingly. Abruptly they remembered that Nelly Page and Jim Gordon were engaged—and they all knew that Gordon's arrest would be a terrible blow to Nelly. And they all loved Nelly, and they all liked Jim, too. But murder was murder; and things certainly did look black against Jim—seein' he was so hard up for money just then. And Nelly—well, somebody'd got to tell her.

It was Judy who told her, of course. And much later, when Tom Floyd, the young local lawyer who was to defend Jim, broke down just before the trial and begged Nelly to get a real lawyer in his place—then it was of course Nelly who roused him to fight to the last breath. But it was Judy who borrowed a horse and buggy and drove over to Bullitt Courthouse, 12 miles away, to try to persuade Mr. Ellis Norton, the big lawyer from the city, who was trying a case there, to come back with her to help defend Jim.

Judy got to Bullitt in time to shoulder her way through the crowd of darkies who were listening outside the courthouse window and to hear Norton's speech which won the prisoner his liberty. And when Norton, sickened by the fetid air of the crowded courthouse, slipped away and started for a walk in the near-by woods, Judy followed him closely in her buggy.

The roads were confusing, and Norton soon lost himself without knowing it. Judy knew that he would, and her face brightened as she followed closer and closer. Her time came at last, when the sun's red radiance, which had tempted the lawyer onward with rainbow promises, abruptly vanished, leaving the path a blue-gray corridor down which the night sped apace.

Norton started, stared about him, looked at his watch, gasped, and set his face to-

ward what he thought was the courthouse. A few steps took him to a fork in the road that faced him with relentless interrogation.

As he paused, hesitating, Judy in her ancient buggy clattered around a curve into view and stopped. Above the mule's twitching ears Judy grinned. "Evenin', suh," she said.

Norton knew little of negroes. He did not return the greeting; he merely stepped nearer.

"Do you know the way to Jackson?" he asked.

Judy grinned more broadly than before. "Does I know the road to Jackson?" she echoed. "Lor', massa, I reckon me an' this yere mewell done wore dat road ourselfs."

"Which way is it?" he asked.

"That a-way, suh!" Judy jerked her head toward the other fork. "But, laws-a-me! It's got a heap of forks in it an' 'lessen you knows it well you's sho' goin' to have a lot of trouble pickin' the right one. I'se gwine there now; an' if you'll do me the honor to demean yo'sef by climbin' up here, suh, I'll be proud to take you there, suh."

Norton nodded. "All right," he answered. "I'll pay you well."

"Don' want no pay, suh. It's a pleasure an' a honor to do a service for a speaker like what you is, suh. Here, you mewell! Git aroun' there. You hear me?"

When she had induced the mule to turn into the desired fork, Norton climbed up beside her. Lawyer as he was, he was nevertheless flattered by Judy's words. "You heard me at the trial?" he questioned.

"Yessuh. I done heard you. You certainly did play pranks on dat jury, gittin' them to let dat old Pike man go when they all jes' knowed he was guilty."

Norton drew himself up. "No! You are wrong," he said, stiffly. "He was not guilty."

With the quick facility of her race Judy changed front. "'Course not," she conceded, promptly. "I was jes' a-meanin' to say that eve'ybody done thought he was guilty 'cept you, suh. I reckon you got a powerful lot of money for comin' way up here f'um the city, suh?"

Norton stiffened. "I got what I asked," he answered dryly.

"Yassuh. I reckon you did, suh. I reckon you got a heap more'n po' folks could pay?"

Norton disliked the questioning, but set it down to the woman's ignorance.

"Very likely," he answered.

"Ain't—ain't you never took a case jes' for kindness, suh?"

Norton was getting irritated. Moreover, he saw intention in the question; and he faced toward the woman with a frown. "Look here—er—what's your name?"

"Judy, suh. Judy Brown."

"Well, Judy, if you've got some friend you want me to defend, forget it. I'm leaving on the 10:30 train tonight, and I wouldn't take another case up here for love or money. Get that?"

"Yassuh. But lemme tell you——"

"No. Don't tell me anything—except how much farther it is to Jackson."

"'Tain't so very far, suh. Mis' Nelly used to say—— You don't know Mis' Nelly, does you, suh?"

"No!" Norton shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"Miss Nelly's my mist'ess, suh. Ole Marse Page used to own me when I was a piccaninny; and when he went to the war he put Miss Nelly's ma in my arms an' told me to take care of her. An' I took care of her an' old marse when he came back till she married an' she an' young marse both died and lef' me another Miss Nelly to take keer of; an' I been lookin' out for her and ole marse ever since. Marse Jim Gordon's her beau. I reckon you done heard of Marse Jim, suh?"

"I haven't the honor!" Norton's tones were dry.

"Well! Marse Jim's a mighty fine gem'man, even if they done put him in jail and is a-tryin' him at Bullitt this very week, same's they been tryin' that ole Pike man at Jackson Co'tehouse."

Norton shrugged his shoulders. "So it was your Marse Jim that you wanted me to defend, was it?" he asked.

"I—I was hopeful you might, suh. 'Course we ain't got no money. Marse Jim's business done gone to rack an' ruin, an' the colonel ain't got but just enough to live on. An' so——"

Norton broke in: "There's no use talking, Judy," he insisted. "I can't take the case. That's flat."

"Then you gwine let 'em hang a innocent boy an' break Miss Nelly's heart?"

"Hang him? What on earth has he done?"

"Ain't done nuthin', suh. He's innocent, same's that Pike man was."

Norton coughed. "Oh! Er—Yes! Quite so! Er—what is he accused of?"

Judy's eyes flashed. "They say he done rob the post-office an' shoot the postmaster," she exploded.

"Whew-oo!" Norton whistled. "That's going some. You begin to interest me. Suppose you tell me the story."

Judy told it, nothing loath, giving a very clear if somewhat biased statement of the facts.

Norton finally tired of the subject. "Well," he said, "I hope Floyd gets him off! It's impossible for me to do anything."

Judy's hopes had soared high and the drop was cruel. "Please, suh! Please, suh," she cried. "Please save him for Miss Nelly. It'll break her heart if——"

Norton frowned. "That'll do," he snapped. "I'm not the only lawyer in the country. And I said 'no!' Understand?"

As he finished he hitched himself about in his seat and stared into the adjacent atmosphere.

Then he started. While he had talked the night had crept upon him. It had grown dark—very dark; and not because of the trees, for few of these were visible. The buggy was moving on level though uneven ground under a starlit sky. Altogether, Norton decided instantly that he ought to have reached Jackson long before.

Angrily he faced back on Judy. "Here!" he raged. "This isn't the way to Jackson."

Judy flicked the mule with her whip before she replied. "No, suh," she said. "This ain't the way to Jackson. Jackson's away behind us. This is the way to Bullitt Co'tehouse. I'se mighty sorry, but I done made sho I could induce you to help Miss Nelly and Marse Jim out; an'——"

Norton saw it all now! No wonder Judy had taken his refusal calmly; she had known she was getting her way. Norton was not a profane man, but this time he went all to pieces. Minute after minute he cursed Judy uphill and downhill, crossways, sideways, anyways, ranging the heights and depths for threats, expletives, objugations, epithets. The least that he promised her was a million years in jail.

When at last, choked by his own passion, he ended with a gasping order to drive him straight back to Jackson, Judy chuckled.

"I knowed it! I knowed it!" she cried. "I knowed you was a speaker. But I ain't never knowed what a speaker you was, suh—if you'll excuse me sayin' so to yo' face. My! Dat jury at Bullitt jes' gwin to curl up an' vote Marse Jim out the minute you talks language like that to 'em. They is so."

Practiced verbal fencer as he was Norton for once found himself without words. The woman's bald effrontery left him gasping, all the more because he instinctively felt that further excoriation would only bring fresh praise for his "language." Instinctively he did the only thing that seemed open to him. He tried to jump from the buggy.

But the jump from a buggy, from a seat in which he was wedged tightly, was not easy. And Judy made it impossible by catching him by the coat tail. Judy was much stronger than he.

"'Scuse me, suh," she said. "This yere road done been corduroyed through a sort of swamp; an' if you git off it in the dark you's mighty like to git choked in a quicksand. There was a man choked to death here on'y a month or two ago."

Judy's statement, as Mark Twain once said of a report that he was dead, was grossly exaggerated; but she knew that it was too dark for Norton to verify any suspicions he might have, and undoubtedly her words had the desired effect.

Norton hesitated for a moment; then

resolutely he swept his brain clear of all anger and personal feeling. Once he had accomplished this he found that he could smile at the humor of being carried off by an old negro woman in order to force him to go into court to defend an accused murderer. Resolving to be revenged on Judy, he calmly settled back into his seat.

"So you're kidnapping me, are you, Judy?" he asked good-humoredly.

Now it was Judy's time to be alarmed. She was altogether too clever not to see danger in such sudden submission. "Nor, suh," she protested, hesitatingly. "Nor, suh! I'se takin' you to see Miss Nelly."

"Oh! Miss Nelly sent you to bring me, did she?"

With sudden passion the woman turned to Norton. "Nor, suh," she said fiercely. "She didn't! Miss Nelly done heard of you, suh, but she ain't liked what she's heard. She wants a lawyer for Mars' Jim that'll save him an' his honor, too, and not just get him off by some trick. But I ain't nothin' but a nigger, an' I ain't got no honor to worry about, an' I don't keer how you save Marse Jim, so long's you do save him. If they hangs Marse Jim, it's gwine to kill Miss Nelly; an' then I'se got to live lonely all the days what's lef' to me. I been livin' with Miss Nelly an' her Ma and her grandpa for more'n sixty years; an' I jes' can't spare her; nor, suh, I can't."

Norton did not answer; he was thinking of what Judy said. He could not recall that any clients of his had ever hesitated to accept any sort of acquittal that he could get for them. What sort of romantic fool could this girl be, or was she a fool at all? he wondered.

At last Judy spoke. "Yonder's the lights along the trolley track that Marse Jim come by that night. Off at the lef' is the lights of Miss Nelly's grandpa's house. Marse Jim is right by, but there ain't no light there. I'se going to take you to Miss Nelly's. She an' Colonel Page'll be mighty glad to welcome you, suh, even though they don't know you're comin', suh."

"Humph!" Norton snorted.

"I know how you feels, suh; but I ax you on my bended knees not to say nothin' about yo' not goin' to defend Marse Jim till after supper, suh. Then, if you're 'bleeged to leave, you can take the trolley in to Bullitt an' catch the same train you'd ha' took from Jackson if you want to, suh."

Norton grunted again. Take that train? Certainly he would take it! Why shouldn't he? The old woman wouldn't have told him about it if she hadn't known that he would find out for himself. He'd show her, confound her——

The mule stopped abruptly before the door, and Judy spoke. "Here we is, suh," she said.

Norton got out, but instead of going toward the house he turned and strode toward the trolley tracks, heedless of Judy's horified protest.

But before he had gone two steps the door of the house flew open and a girl came flying down the steps. "That you, Judy?" she called.

"Yes'm, Miss Nelly, yes'm. An' here's the lawyer man from over at Jackson. He's —he's"—Judy bent down—"he's jes' a Yankee an' he's shy, Miss Nelly," she whispered in very audible tones. "Stop him, for the love of God!"

"Judy! What have you been doing?" Nelly raced around the mule. "I beg yo' pardon, suh," she called.

Her voice was the sweetest that Norton had ever heard. He turned and came back.

"I beg yo' pardon, suh. I reckon Judy's been up to some devilment, or she wouldn't be so scared. She's always up to devilment. Whatever it is, I'm mighty sorry and Dad'll be too. Won't you come in and let us both tell you so?"

Norton smiled. The electric light on the trolley line was some distance away, but it was strong enough to convince Norton that the girl's face matched her voice. Abruptly he decided that he was acting like a churl.

"Why, thank you! I'll be delighted," he said. "As to Judy—well, she's been very entertaining and very clever. I don't believe I should ever have gotten here if it hadn't been for her."

Chuckling to herself, Judy led the mule away. "Speaker!" she muttered. "I should say he is a speaker. An' he's quality folks,

too, even if he is a Yankee. Yes! An' if I knows the signs, he's a eater, too. Oh, Lord"—reverently Judy turned her eyes upward to the star-spangled firmament—"oh, Lord, please don't let that stove play no tricks on me tonight! Please, Lord! I got to give that man a dinner he won't forget."

Meanwhile Nelly led Norton within and presented him to her father.

Colonel Page was very old and wandering in his speech, but the habit of courtesy to guests was too ingrained in him to be lost short of the grave. He welcomed Norton warmly and then sat back and left the conversation to his daughter. And for the first time Norton had a chance to really look at her by a satisfactory light.

Whatever Norton had expected to find, what he did find was not what he had expected. The slim, girlish figure in the well-worn black dress with the narrow white ruching at the neck and wrists did not look like one who could control so determined an attendant as Judy had proved herself to be. Her bright dark eyes smiled up at him with a gaze half shy, half curious, wholly welcoming, that put him at once at home. Her beautiful soft hair lent exactly the needed touch to her features.

Norton's brain whirled. "Lord! Lord!" he muttered to himself. "It's she! It's the girl I've been looking for all my life. And she's promised to another man—to the very man I've got to save for her."

Of the talk while they waited for supper all that Norton ever could remember was that it was soft and sweet—like old songs he used to sing when he was young.

Judy, however, broke the spell. Few other cooks could have done it. But the supper she served was one whose memory, Norton swears, will descend with him into the hungry grave—hot biscuits lighter than air; broilers fried in butter; corn fritters; real Brunswick stew; sliced tomatoes with genuine mayonnaise; popovers; coffee with cream that could have been eaten with a fork, and the first honest-to-goodness apple pie that he had ever tasted in all his life.

After Norton had eaten till he felt that he had passed the utmost limits of good breeding and had watched his bird-like vis-à-vis nibble at what to him food fit for the gods, he went with her back to the sitting room.

The Colonel excused himself and went upstairs, leaving the two alone. Then Norton bent forward. "I want to help you," he said. "I have several spare days that I will be delighted to use in defending the 'Jim' that Judy has told me about. Won't you let me help Mr. Floyd?"

Nelly tried to protest with confused words about money; but Norton refused to listen. "Let me give my services for once," he said. "It will be something to look back on. Now, please tell me the whole story of Jim's troubles as you have learned it."

Nelly told it, and Norton listened, asking a question now and then. Swiftly the winged words flew till at last Judy, appearing behind her mistress, shook her head and gestulated with her eyes, and Norton, suddenly conscious that his hostess was overtrying her strength, rose and said good-night.

Then, escorted by Judy, he climbed the stairs, to find the softest, whitest bed, with a night shirt—evidently belonging to the Colonel—hung across the foot of it; and to hear Judy say, "God bless you, suh; if you'll excuse an ol' nigger woman for sayin' so! I ain't seen Mis' Nelly so happy since the day of Marse Jim's trouble." Then Judy went out and closed the door.

Norton gazed after her despairingly. "Dog-gone that old woman," he muttered. "I swore I'd get even with her, but I can't. And she knew darned well I wouldn't." Norton paused; a beatific smile passed over his face. "Gee!" he exclaimed. "Can't she cook!"

The next morning Judy called him to an early breakfast.

"I ain't waked Miss Nelly," she said, "'cause that chile's goin' to need her rest to stan' what's gwine to happen down at the co'tehouse today. I done got your breakfas' early 'cause I knowed you'll be wanting to see that Floyd boy an' maybe Marse Jim befo' the co'te meets. An' I got the mule hitched up so's we c'n drive to town if you want to ax me any mo' questions while we

goes. Course we c'n take the trolley if you wants to."

Norton opened his mouth to say that he would take the trolley; but just then Judy put before him a plate of golden-brown batter cakes, a great heap of scrambled eggs (scrambled right) and a cup of coffee even better than that he had had the night before, and his protest died on his lips.

Later, when Judy "tolled him" into the Floyd boy's office and explained to that young man that Miss Nellie had "done brung Marse Norton down from New York to help defend Marse Jim, but wanted Marse Floyd to help," he did not even protest.

Only after he had gotten rid of Judy by insisting that he must talk with Floyd in private did he explain that it was he who was to conduct the trial. "Your local knowledge will help me to win the case, though."

Floyd, who had looked chap-fallen, perked up at this. "I'm mighty glad you've come, suh." he said. "Things are goin' bad, an' I don't know how I'm going to look Nelly in the face if I don't save Jim! I'd be glad to aid you, sir."

Norton caught and read the other's glance. "You, too?" he murmured.

"Eh? Oh, yes! And I'm not the only one, God bless her. But it looks mighty bad for Jim. He's got a good reputation and I don't reckon they'll hang him on circumstantial evidence; but they're mighty likely to send him to jail for a good many years."

"No chance for an alibi?"

Floyd shook his head. "Not a bit. By his own testimony and other folks', too, Jim had thirty minutes to get home after Bates was shot, and thirty was plenty. If the county attorney was one of our kind we'd have a chance, but he's a damn black Republican Yankee and —— Oh! I beg your pardon, suh!"

"Never mind! No time for apologies. Go ahead."

"Thank you, suh. Creswell and Allen swore yesterday that Jim was cool and calm when they saw him, not a bit as if he'd been hurrying on a hot night, as he'd have had to do to get there in thirty minutes. But Swanson—he's the county attorney—made monkeys out of them. I was going to call Judy this morning, but it doesn't seem hardly worth while."

Norton laughed. "Oh! It's worth while, I guess," he said. "Judging from my brief acquaintance with that colored lady, Swanson won't make a monkey out of her. I've got a hunch that Judy may turn the trick. No, nothing definite, you know; just a hunch. Where is she? I'd like to talk to her again."

"I'll see if I can find her." Floyd hurried from the room.

As the door closed behind him Norton faced to the back and raised his voice. "Come in, Judy," he called.

The rear door opened an' Judy entered. Her eyes were big. "How'd you know I was there, suh?" she questioned fearfully. "You ain't workin' no rabbit foot on me, is you?"

Norton laughed. "I deduced you, Judy," he said. "You couldn't have been anywhere else. Now I want you to think hard and see if you can't remember something that happened while you were watching those other men at the gate. When did you see them first? As soon as you got to the window?"

"Nor, suh! That is, I seed 'em right away, but I didn't know 't'was them right away, 'cause——"

The door swung open and Floyd came in. "I can't find her," he began. Then, "Oh! Here she is. Where'd you come from, Judy?"

Norton interposed. "She was just telling me why she couldn't see Jim and those two men at first on that night. Why was it, Judy?"

Judy told him.

The two lawyers looked at each other. Floyd's eyes were big with astonishment and perhaps mortification, while Norton's were quizzical. "How much later was it before that posse came out to arrest Gordon, Judy?" he asked.

"Bout an hour, suh. I was settin' my bread, an'——"

"Exactly!" Norton turned to Floyd,

"That may fix the time absolutely," he said. "Suppose you go and see—er——"

"Sewell?"

"Yes! If that's his name. If things pan out, find Allen and Creswell and tell them to be ready to testify further, if we want them. And then perhaps you'd better swear out a search warrant and get a deputy sheriff and witnesses to serve it at the proper time."

"A search warrant? Against who?"

Norton grinned. "Don't you know?"

Floyd stared in bewilderment. Then light dawned in his eyes. "Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "I never thought of that." Out of the door he shot.

Twenty minutes later he was back. "It's all right," he chortled. "Everything's all right. It looks like a walkover. Miss Nelly and Colonel Page are waitin' outside, but I haven't told him anything. I reckon we'd better get over to court."

Norton nodded. "All right, we'll go," he said. "Tell Miss Nelly everything is coming right, but warn her not to look too happy."

A few moments later the court was called to order and Norton was properly introduced. Later he met his client, who stared at him curiously, wondering whence he had sprung. Norton stared back and admitted grudgingly to himself that Jim appeared to be all right. "Hang it! I'm an old grouch," he muttered. "I ought to be glad. I am glad if he's what he ought to be—confound him!"

Then he began addressing the Court.

"Your Honor," he said, "I ask that you direct that no one be permitted to leave the courtroom for the next hour without your express permission."

A stir in the court followed. Men looked at each other questioningly. Something was "doing." But what?

The Judge's gavel fell. "The sheriff will guard the doors and let no one leave the courtroom without my permission," he directed.

Norton called Judy to the stand. Rapidly he skimmed over the preliminaries. "Why couldn't you recognize the man at the gate at first, Judy?" he asked at last.

"Can't see in the dark, suh. There warn't no moon an' the 'lectric lights on the trolley done gone out, suh."

A rustle in the courtroom followed. Many recalled vaguely that light had played some part or other in the killing. But for a moment they could not remember the connection.

Norton, however, went on calmly: "How long were the lights out, Judy?" he asked.

"'Bout a minute, I reckon, suh."

"And when they came on?"

"I knowed the three of 'em right away, suh. There's a big light right by our gate, suh."

Swanson had some questions to ask Judy, but they amounted to nothing. When he had finished Norton recalled Allen and Creswell in rapid succession. Both of them corroborated Judy's statement about the lights, explaining that they hadn't thought of it before.

As Creswell stepped from the stand a note from outside the courthouse was brought to Floyd. He read it, showed it to Norton, and he called Sewell, engineer in charge of the trolley and electric light plant, to the stand.

Sewell swore and proved by the automatic records that he had brought to court with him that the lights had gone out only once on that night, and that on that one occasion they had remained out for a little less than a minute—from 10:03 to 10:04.

Excitement was growing in the courtroom. Some had recalled when and how the lights had figured in the killing, and the information was being passed around the room in whispers. As Swanson rose to cross-question the witness the voice of Tillman, the station agent, rose from near the door.

"Pardon me, Your Honor," he quavered, "but I must get back to the station. I hadn't any right to stay away as long as I have. Messages are likely to come over the wire, and accidents may happen if I don't get there. Will Your Honor direct the sheriff to let me leave the room?"

But Norton was on his feet. "I object, Your Honor!" he cried. "I was going to call Mr. Tillman as my next witness. I think his testimony will be important."

The Judge looked at Tillman. "You will remain, Mr. Tillman," he said.

Tillman's eyes widened. "But——" he began.

The Judge's gavel fell, and the bailiff roared "Silence." But above the din Tillman's voice rose higher. "There'll be an accident!" he shrieked. "People will be killed. Oh! My God! I've got to go!"

Norton interposed. "There is no danger, Your Honor," he said. "The Western Union's commercial operator is holding down Mr. Tillman's job for the moment. He is entirely competent. If my learned friend"—Norton bowed to the county attorney—"will dismiss the present witness it will hasten Mr. Tillman's examination."

Swanson shrugged his shoulders. Clearly he had read the writing on the wall. "Oh, all right," he acceded. "I'm done with the witness. Go ahead and get it over with."

At Norton's call Tillman, white as death and shivering, stumbled down the aisle to the stand.

Norton stared at him truculently. "I have only one question to ask you, Mr. Tillman," he rasped. "Several witnesses, yourself among them, testified day before yesterday that the electric lights went out just as you looked at your watch to fix the moment of Bates's death, and that you had to wait in the darkness for them to come on again. You swore that your time was then 9:40, and that this was not more than ten minutes after you had seen the burglar escape across the railway track. That is, you and your watch fixed the shooting at about 9:30. I should like to know how you reconcile this with the trolley company's records that show that the lights went out at 10:03; that is, that the murder was committed about 10 o'clock when Gordon was at home instead of at 9:30, when he was with you at the railway station?"

Twice Tillman moistened his lips. Then: "My watch must have been wrong," he mumbled.

"Wrong? How did it get wrong?"

"I don't know."

"You do know! Your watch was wrong because you set it back twenty or thirty minutes while you waited in the darkness beside the man you had murdered for the lights to come on. You did this because Bates had just said that the burglar looked like Jim; and because you remembered that you had dropped Jim's knife on the floor after you cut that money package open. You remembered, too, that he had left you about half an hour before, and you figured he would have just about gotten home and might have witnesses to prove it. And he did. And you thought that if you could set the time of the murder back half an hour or so it would prevent him proving an alibi. You had to think fast, and you did it, and took the chance. You fool! To think that you could rend and patch the warp of the universe without leaving a ragged seam to convict you! You can't do things like that, Tillman! God won't let you! It was you who robbed the post-office and shot Bates. Your lie betrayed you. If it hadn't been for it I would never have sent the sheriff half an hour ago with a search warrant that enabled him to find the stolen money in your trunk!"

Tillman flung up his hands. "I confess," he mumbled dully. "I didn't mean to kill Bates; and—and I—I—didn't have any-anything against Jim. I only—— Oh, my God! What's the use? I did it! I did it!' '

An hour later Norton caught a midday train that would enable him to make connections for his home.

Judy was at the station with the rest to see him off. "God bless you again, a million times, suh," she said. "I know who 'twas really saved Marse Jim, though of course that Floyd boy done heself proud by helpin'. When you'd turned on yo' language for five minutes the jury jest had ter acquit Marse Jim."

Norton sighed as he boarded the train and glanced back at Jim Gordon. He was holding Nelly's hand.

The Unwelcome Lesson

By EDWARD ETTINGER

I GENERALLY do my utmost to discourage people from leading a life of crime. No, I'm not a minister or a reformer. I'm a thief, and if I were forced to admit it, I am one of the cleverest in the game.

The profession is overcrowded, and there is hardly any room for the novices that are joining every year. We old-timers can take care of everything nicely. The newcomers merely cause the large cities to increase their police and detective forces.

Nothing gives me more moral satisfaction than to prove to the would-be criminal that a career of crime does not pay. I had such an opportunity when I recently stayed at one of the largest hotels in New York.

This is how it happened:

"Hello, what is that?" asked the hotel telephone operator.

"This is Mrs. Avery of Room 708," answered the voice. "I want you to send up the house detective at once."

The girl at the switch-board motioned to a thick-set man with black, bushy eyebrows and a pugnacious jaw who was leaning against the head porter's desk. He was Jim Duffield, the hotel sleuth.

"You're wanted up in Room 708," she said to him when he walked over.

He strolled over to the elevator in a very leisurely manner and rode up to the seventh floor. Mrs. Avery was standing on the threshold waiting for him.

"Are you the house detective?" she inquired.

"Yes," he answered. "What's the trouble here?"

"A diamond ring has been stolen from my room."

"When did it happen?"

"This very minute. I was all dressed to go out and I only walked down the corridor to the elevators when I reminded myself that I had left the ring on the dresser. I came right back. I found this maid in the room, but the ring was gone."

The detective turned to the chambermaid.

"Do you know anything about this, Hilda?" he asked.

"No, sir," she replied quickly.

"Was there any one else in this room besides you after Mrs. Avery left?"

"No, sir."

"Well," deduced the detective, "then the ring must be here, if you left it here."

"I'm positive I left it on the dresser," asserted Mrs. Avery.

The detective hunted high and low, but could find no trace of the ring.

"Where was the maid when you entered the room?" he asked of Mrs. Avery.

"She was in the bath-room washing her hands."

The detective searched every corner of the bath-room, but without result.

"It's funny," he remarked. "I can't see how the ring could disappear so quickly."

"I'm sure she has it," accused Mrs. Avery, "and I demand that she be searched."

"Did you hear that, Hilda?" asked the detective.

"Yes, sir."

"You have no objection to being searched, do you?"

"No, sir."

The detective telephoned down for one of the hotel matrons, and when she appeared he left the room.

In the presence of Mrs. Avery and the

matron Hilda removed all her clothing, which was carefully searched, but the ring was not found. After she was dressed, the detective was called in and told the result.

"I'm awful sorry, Mrs. Avery, but you see I've done the best I can," he said. "You surely can't accuse Hilda now after she permitted herself to be searched on the spot. Try to think back. Perhaps you left it somewhere else."

"No, I'm positive I left it here," Mrs. Avery reiterated.

"May I go on with my work now, Mr. Duffield?" Hilda asked.

"Yes, yes, go ahead."

Hilda gathered the soiled towels that were in the bath-room and put others in their place. Then she picked up the used cake of soap, and put a new one in its place. She straightened the mat and left the room.

"To tell you the truth, Mrs. Avery," said the detective, "I didn't think you'd find it on Hilda, for she is very honest."

"It's strange, though, how it disappeared," she commented. "Oh, well, I'll get Fred to buy me another."

That is the story I got from the hotel detective while I sat and chatted with him in the hotel lobby. I was traveling under the alias of Will Roberts, a stock salesman.

In order to keep in touch with the rumors of my profession I generally made it my business to cultivate the acquaintance of unsuspecting detectives. Very often, as in this case, they presented me with valuable information. It was a case of dropping golden apples into my lap.

"Who is this Mrs. Avery?" I asked.

"Well, she's been stopping in this hotel for quite a while. Money doesn't mean anything to her. Her husband is a bootlegger. He can buy her a dozen diamond rings."

"In that case I suppose the incident is closed."

"Yes, I'll forget all about it."

"Did she ever lose any diamonds before?" I asked.

"No, this is the first time. But say, if she ain't worried, why should I be?"

"I guess you're right there," I answered. "Hilda will have something to talk about when she goes home at ten o'clock."

"No, she goes home at six," he corrected. me.

We chatted for a few more moments and then I left him. Somehow or other I could not dismiss the incident from my mind as the detective did. From what he told me of Mrs. Avery, I honestly believed that she had left the ring on the dresser. She did not seem to be the type of woman who would forget things easily. Now, considering the circumstances, Hilda admitting that no one had been in the room and Mrs. Avery's assertion that she had come right back after only walking down the corridor, there surely wasn't much time for Hilda to hide the ring if she really had stolen it.

I was sure that the room had been thoroughly searched, for Jim Duffield had been a hotel detective long enough to know all possible nooks and corners of a room in which a ring could be hidden. And I was sure that Hilda had been searched thoroughly, for every stitch of clothing had been removed from her.

Where, then, could the ring have possibly gone to?

I went up to the seventh floor and in a very casual manner had Hilda pointed out to me. She was a medium-sized girl with blonde hair and blue eyes of the Scandinavian type.

I'm a pretty good judge of my own kind, and when I looked at her I felt sure that she was not a thief. By that I mean some one who has been stealing continuously.

I looked at my watch, and it was only five o'clock, so I went down to the lobby again. I bought a big cigar, seated myself in one of the comfortable arm-chairs and put my thinking cap on. I hate mysteries, except the kind that I leave for the police.

Once again I reviewed everything the house detective had told me. I analyzed each step, looking for a possible clue. Then, like a ray of sunshine coming out from behind the dark clouds, an idea entered my mind.

"By Jove!" I exclaimed, as I struck my fist in the palm of my hand.

It was only a hunch, but I decided to see

it through. I waited very impatiently for the time to pass. At a quarter of six I walked out of the hotel lobby and went around the corner to the employees' entrance.

I stationed myself on the opposite side of the street and waited.

At five minutes past six Hilda came out. She was dressed in a black serge skirt and a black serge coat that reached a little below her hips. On her wrist dangled a small black leather pocketbook.

She walked up the street and I followed her on the other side, keeping a safe distance behind. When she reached the more congested section, I crossed and followed right behind her.

She was headed for the Times Square subway station, and I was glad of it. I followed her through the turnstiles and stood right behind her while she waited for the train to pull in.

The guard opened the doors and then there was a mad rush to get in. That was the moment I had been preparing for. With a pretty little tool, made for just that purpose, I cut the pocketbook from the handle without her knowing it. I pushed my way through the car and left it at the side door.

By the time Hilda would realize her loss the train would be speeding away and I would be leaving the subway.

With the pocketbook safe in my pocket, I walked back to the hotel and went up to my room.

As I said before, I generally do my utmost to discourage people from leading a life of crime. Nothing gives me more moral satisfaction than to prove to the would-be criminal that a career of crime does not pay. The straight and narrow path is the best for them to follow.

When I emptied the contents of the bag on my table, there fell out a quarter and two pennies, two safety pins, a latch-key, a piece of chewing-gum and a cake of used soap.

I broke the soap into bits, and there I found Mrs. Avery's diamond ring.

The explanation is simple. When Hilda heard Mrs. Avery coming back, she forced the ring into the soap, and as Mrs. Avery admitted, when she came in, Hilda was washing her hands. She wasn't, however; she was merely smoothing the surface of the soap with water so it would not be noticed that it had been tampered with.

When she had asked the detective if she could go on with her work again, she picked up the soap and put a new cake in its place. Right under their noses she took the ring out of the room.

However, I believe that Hilda has learned her lesson. Honest people should remain honest.

You ought to see the beautiful stick-pin I made out of that ring!

AN AUTOMATIC BURGLAR GUN

A BURGLAR gun, which operates automatically without requiring the presence of any other person than the burglar, has been invented by Francis F. Jobson of Mentone, Ala. The device consists of a barrel mounted on a standard and having a firing pin slidably mounted on the standard and actuated by a coiled spring. A trigger latches this firing pin in retracted position and it is operated by a cord which is secured to some suitable object in the room so that the trespasser in going about will come in contact with it and thereby release the trigger and discharge the gun. If it is intended to kill or seriously wound the tresspasser the cord is placed in line with the barrel of the gun, while if it is intended merely to slightly wound or frighten off the intruder, the cord may be placed at an angle to the barrel of the gun. The device has actually been used with success in trapping thieves in the inventor's town, where they were systematically robbing a grocery store.

The Girl in the Case

By RALEIGH E. ROSS

DETECTIVE KANE lit a fresh stogie and looked at his watch. Nine o'clock. He little guessed it, but his most eventful hour had begun.

The big excursion steamer beside which he was standing was ready to start her maiden trip. A man and a boy held the mooring ropes ready to cast them off the dock-posts whenever the order was passed. The captain impatiently paced the bridge, little heeding the chill morning wind that swept up the Chicago River. A tug panted importantly before the bow of the steamer, its tow lines fast.

Kane shivered despite his light overcoat. He had been at the dock watching for a missing girl for two raw hours. He was a little man with a soft, black velour hat, heavy shoes and shining, watching eyes, and he looked singularly small and unimportant standing near the big glistening steamer.

As he returned his watch to his vest pocket he revealed an unusually light watch-chain with what appeared to be a very heavy charm. It was made of lead encased in gold. The lead part had been presented to Kane by Killer Flannigan one wintry night several years before. The Killer had made sure that Kane received it by pumping it into him from a blue-steel revolver muzzle.

To the detective his charm was an encouragement. It represented victory over odds he might never have to face again.

Shifting his inevitable stogie to one corner of his mouth, Kane looked across the dock. A cab had stopped and a trio of late passengers hastened toward the steamer—that is, the two men did. The girl between them seemed strangely indifferent despite their best efforts to hurry her. A doctor might have guessed that she was under the influence of a drug; but no doctor was watching.

She wore a long tan coat, a brown turban and a heavy veil.

Her companion on the left had the slim waist, broad shoulders, and springy walk of a pugilist. The man on the right was shorter and stockier, and wore a heavy black overcoat.

The impatient purser had gone inside, and the gangplank was in charge of one of the uniformed second stewards, who evidently had orders to haul it in as soon as the trio came aboard. Kane stepped quickly forward as the three approached the gangplank.

"Just a moment," he said quietly.

The big fellow swung around to face the little man.

"Wot's the idea?" he began belligerently.

But Kane sprang after the other two without answering as they attempted to board the steamer.

The big man dug his left elbow into Kane's stomach and the latter's hands went down.

Kane sought to raise his arms too late. A hard right fist caught him squarely on the point of the jaw, and he went down and out as neatly as if struck by an avalanche.

The gangplank was partly hauled in, but the big fellow easily jumped the gap between the dock and the vessel.

Kane opened his eyes to find a dock hand bathing his face.

"Soon you'll be 'round all right," the man said cheerily. "I'd like to throw that fellow in the river. Shame to hit a little man like that."

"My own fault," said Kane dizzily.

"Should have been on my guard. Brass knuckles, I'll bet," and he sat up and rubbed his jaw. "Not broken, anyway."

The *North Star* was waiting for the bridge to open half a block below. Kane drew back his coat, showing his badge.

"I'm a detective," he said, "and a bum one, I guess. But I've got to get that man. Is there a tug around here?"

The dock hand, a burly Scandinavian, scratched his head.

"Nothing but the *Mary Lee*," he said. "She's towing the *North Star*."

"Can't wait for her," Kane said, rather impatiently. "I must catch that ship."

"There's the *Ray Parker*, pop," said the boy at the mooring hawser, pointing eagerly. "She towed that big lumber boat out." The tug in question was just going under the bridge.

"Shall I stop her?" asked the Swede.

"By all means," said Kane, scrambling to his feet. "Now, boy, I'm going to give you a chance to earn a dollar."

He scribbled a telephone number on a slip from his notebook and handed it to the youngster.

"Phone Robert Gordon at this number, and tell him to order his yacht to follow the *North Star* immediately. Get that?"

The boy nodded and hurried away with a crisp dollar bill and a nickel for the phone call.

The *North Star* was almost at the head of the river when the *Ray Parker* started in pursuit. The dock hand, who had introduced himself as John Olson, had offered to go with Kane, and now stood in the bow of the tug with him.

"We'll catch her," he said. "She has to go out a ways and swing 'round before she starts under her own power. Say, that girl didn't want to go with those guys, did she? Were they kidnapping her, I wonder?"

"I have reason to think so," said Kane.

"Yust let me meet 'em," said the big Swede, his broad face flushed with anger.

"You'll have your chance," said Kane. "It ought to be easy to find them. Have you a gun?"

"No."

"Better be careful, then. They're a bad crowd. I have only my revolver, or I'd lend you one."

"I don't need one," growled the Swede, and Kane, looking at his massive arms, believed him.

They caught the *North Star* just as the tugboat tow lines were thrown into the water. The captain growled from the bridge as the two men came aboard, but he was civil enough when he found who Kane was.

"Hate to have trouble on our first trip, Mr. Kane," he said frankly, "but of course I'll help you all I can. These people must be on board. We'll find them." He hesitated, then added: "Both the purser and I will have our hands full for a few minutes. Will you sit below on the windward side so that you can be found easily? I'll detail some one to help you soon."

Kane went below and sat with Olson on the side indicated. It was almost deserted. Most of the passengers were either in the salon listening to the orchestra or on the more sheltered lee side of the ship.

Robert Gordon, a Chicago millionaire, was president of the First National Bank, and director in several important corporations. Two days previous his daughter Pearl had disappeared; she had started for high-school, but never reached it.

Every policeman and detective in the city had her description, and strict search had been made for her, but in vain. It was thought that she was being held for ransom, and that her captors had not had an opportunity to quit Chicago. So every train leaving the city was closely watched. Even automobiles were halted if they looked at all suspicious. And Kane had been detailed to watch the passengers entering the *North Star*.

Gordon had given orders to have his yacht ready to stand out in the lake and see that no small boats attempted to beat up the shore—craft that the abductors might hire.

Mrs. Gordon was prostrated by the blow, and the veteran banker was of course thoroughly aroused. He was using every method in his power to discover his daughter's whereabouts.

In a stateroom of the *North Star* two men were working feverishly with needle and

thread. The girl sat at the end of the bunk indifferently watching them.

They were sewing her tan coat to a couple of pillows and some of the rolled-up bedding.

"It won't be much of a dummy," said the smaller man, "but it ought to fool him. Do you think he recognized you, Mule?"

"Mule" Kelley rubbed his broad chin reflectively.

"Yes, I guess he did, just before I hit him; but it was too late then. I don't think he knew the girl."

"Don't fool yourself!" snapped "Runt" Barron. "I know all about Kane. He used to be patrolman on the beat where Gordon lived, up there on the North Shore. The little girl was a great favorite of his. I think he recognized her, even if he couldn't see her face."

"Liked her, did he?" growled Kelley. "Well, then our present little scheme ought to work all the better if we can get up to the deck without being seen."

"That'll be O. K.," said "Runt" confidently. "Be sure and throw that dummy far enough out so he can see it."

Up on the promenade deck Kane was getting restive. The chill wind had driven every one inside but himself and Olson. The ten minutes he was asked to wait had expired. He walked to the stern and looked back toward the Chicago Yacht Club, but could see no yacht approaching.

Kane wondered if this girl in brown was really the curly-haired little tot he had known out on the North Shore. Of all the girls, she had been the least awed by the policeman's brass buttons and club. The two had been friends—perhaps on Kane's part because his daughter Gertrude was about the same age. He had often told his wife about the little rich girl with the golden hair and voice like a bell. As she tripped to school, Officer Kane was usually somewhere along the route, and often when she came home at noon he was on hand to give her a smiling nod.

Pearl Gordon, on her part, was immensely proud, in her childish way, of her friend in blue. Her father had no clothing as fine as his, and her father could not carry a club nor stop runaway horses, nor help ladies across the street, nor tell people the way to all sorts of distant places.

The strange comradeship was suddenly broken. Kane, going on the night shift, had promptly gotten into the shooting scrape previously narrated. After leaving the hospital he had been promoted to the detective force, but among the memories of his policehood none stood out so vividly and pleasantly as the sunny-haired girl of the North Shore.

Of course it did not seem possible that this tall, tan-clad girl he had seen was the tousled-haired, smiling tot of former years, but the years bring changes. He knew that he might have had some difficulty in recognizing Pearl, if it were she, even without her veil.

Kane threw a half-smoked stogie over the rail, an unheard-of thing for him to do, and strode back amidships.

"Bring up that purser," he growled to Olson. "We've been waiting long enough."

Olson hurried through the cabin and down to the lower deck. He did not notice "Runt" Barron, who had been watching the two from his cabin window. "Runt" was very quiet till the big Swede was out of sight, then he hurried to the upper deck by the companionway on the lee side.

"Now," he shouted to the waiting Kelley, who stood behind the cabin amidships.

The captain saw "Runt" and heard the cry, but there was no law against shouting. And as "Runt" immediately disappeared down the companionway the captain thought nothing of it.

The big Irishman sprang to the edge of the deck, between two lifeboats, Taking a firm grip on the pillow-stuffed dummy, he threw it with all his might.

It was a fatal thing for a man of his weight, for he tripped. With a vain back clutch at the low railing, "Mule" plunged down toward the cold waves.

Detective Kane was startled to see a tan-clad figure hurtle past him into the water, followed immediately by a man. He imagined that the girl had been thrown overboard, and that one of her captors had overbalanced and fallen in, too.

With a shout he flung off his overcoat, leaped to the rail, and dove as far out as possible, but the wind took his cry, and only one man saw him dive. That one, the "Runt," with a smile of satisfaction, slunk back to his stateroom.

Kane struck out strongly, hoping to avoid the suction of the ship, but in the choppy waves it was more luck than science that kept him afloat.

The detective was a good swimmer, but this was his first experience swimming in most of his clothes. With some difficulty he got rid of his coat. His shoes seemed to weigh at least ten pounds apiece and the rest of his clothes were heavy as he strove to reach the girl. He caught glimpses of her between waves when he raised his head.

Kane had had many curious surprises during his life, but none so discouraging as it was to find that the "girl" was a decoy.

The detective turned around disgusted, and to his dismay he saw the ship some distance away, going at her usual speed. Kane now noticed a prodigious splashing a short distance away.

It was the man who had fallen in with the bogus girl. Even as the detective heard his strangled cries, he guessed who he was. A few strokes brought him nearer.

The man, very red of face, had evidently swallowed considerable water. The detective had never seen a look of greater terror upon a human countenance. He recognized "Mule" Kelley, the man who had struck him down.

"Mule" Kelley's nickname had been earned in the prize ring. He was about winded when he saw the detective and thrashed toward him with frantic strokes.

"Not so fast," said Kane, keeping out of his way. "Cool down, then put your hand on my back—keep afloat."

"Mule" seemed to understand. He relaxed his efforts, to show that he was cool, and sank beneath the surface. He came up again, more dead than alive and more desperate than ever. With the help of a wave and a quick lunge, he reached Kane.

The detective, feeling the powerful arms creeping up toward his neck, struck with all his might. Once, twice, three times he had to batter at that contorted face before the arms relaxed. "Mule" Kelley was knocked out.

"Well, I'm even," thought Kane grimly.

Holding the man by the hair, Kane tried to float on his back. This could not last long, he knew, but he gritted his teeth. Perhaps on the ship they had found his overcoat, and would guess what had happened.

On the *North Star* there was considerable excitement. The big Swede insisted that his friend had jumped overboard and produced the overcoat to prove it. The purser refused to believe it, but they hurried to get the captain.

That worthy sniffed at the idea, then, seeing the Swede's clenched fists and rising anger, phoned orders to stop the engines.

The three rushed back to the stern, and the captain swept the white-capped expanse with his glasses. At first he could see nothing but a trim yellow yacht about a quarter of a mile away.

Then, somewhat nearer, he made out what appeared to be a log in the water. Adjusting his glasses to the distance, he made fairly sure that it was a man.

"It may be too late for us to go back," he said; "your friend must be nearly tuckered out now. If the crew of that yacht don't see him he'll be gone before we could reach him."

Above their heads the wireless suddenly began to crackle.

"That boat is signaling," said the Swede excitedly. "It's Mr. Gordon's yacht."

The dignified captain never moved so quickly as he did to reach the wireless operator's office. He spoke to the man and this message crackled out over the lake to the yacht: "Look to port. Look to port."

Kane lay on his back floating. One hand kept him up, with the help of his feet, and the other hand clutched the unconscious "Mule."

The detective was growing exhausted and his eyes closed.

A sudden noise caused him to open his eyes and he stared unbelievingly. It was a big round life preserver.

He reached out a hand and clutched it.

More dead than alive, the two men were

lifted into a small boat and were taken to the yacht. First aid soon brought the detective around, but "Mule" appeared to be dead. Finally, however, he responded to the skill of the sailors working over him by coming to his senses.

Meanwhile the yacht had come alongside of the *North Star,* and the captain, cursing inwardly, again had his engines stopped. Several men from the *Algoma* came aboard, among them the detective and the white-haired banker, Robert Gordon.

"Have you searched the staterooms?" demanded Kane.

"Why—er—no," admitted the captain. "Not yet."

"Well, we must begin," snapped Gordon, "and you don't get under way till we finish. I'm a director in this steamship line, captain."

The captain became more deferential. He now remembered that the treasurer of the company was named Gordon, and this must be the man.

"I think we had better start with the inside staterooms, Mr. Gordon," said Kane, biting off the end of a soggy stogie. "These crooks probably hired cheaper rooms. It would attract less attention."

"Sounds reasonable, Kane," agreed the banker, as the detective lit his stogie. "We must search this tub from stem to stern."

Kane nodded, satisfying clouds of smoke rolling about his head.

The banker coughed.

"I see you're still smoking those vile ropes," he growled. "Here, have a decent cigar. And damn it, man, let's get started."

Kane accepted a fine Havana with a bow and thrust it carefully in his vest pocket.

"You're no more anxious than I am, Mr. Gordon," he replied. "But a little preliminary thought saves a lot of time. You begin at the bow of the salon deck on the port side with the purser. Olson and I will take the starboard side. By the way, I wonder what that Swede is up to? I haven't seen him since we came aboard."

He did not have to wait long for an answer, for Olson had been making progress in searching all the staterooms.

He finally knocked on the door of 110. Silence! A splintering of wood! A shot!

The limp figure of "Runt" was soon dragged out from beneath the curling, acrid smoke by the big Swede. His face bore marks of battering, and in his hand was still clenched a revolver. The abducted girl was in the room and had just recovered from the effects of a drug the two crooks had given her.

The girl rushed to her father

Kane entered just then and placed a slip of paper in front of Olsen.

"Your half of the reward," he said crisply. "We go fifty-fifty on this. I couldn't have finished this job only for you."

And thus merit found its own reward.

PINK CANDLE THIEVES

HOUSEHOLDERS in the towns and villages of lower Delaware are greatly puzzled and much alarmed over the frequent incursions of a band of burglars who have been operating extensively in this section for more than six months. Notwithstanding the fact that these robbers always use pink candles to light them in their operations, and almost invariably leave large trails of the grease about the houses pillaged, no trace of the men has been found that promises to lead to their capture.

The Pink Candle Burglars take chickens, money and articles found about the home of the village folk, but they pass by jewelry, watches and silverware, for some unknown reason and take other objects of questionable value.

Evidently the gang hunts in automobiles, for it carries away as many as fifty or 100 chickens at a time, and the most mystifying feature of the looting is that the burglars have never awakened a household nor an inmate of a dwelling they have robbed.

The Inevitable

By DR. W. J. CAMPBELL

THE little tar-paper shack stood on a sand ridge overlooking the cranberry swamp and the ice-cold trout stream in the distance. Immediately at its rear, to the north, lay an unbroken forest of pines, cedars and jack oaks. It was miles to the nearest habitation, an ideal spot for the hunter or fisherman.

Here I decided to pitch my camp and spend the few weeks of my outing, so I took temporary possession. There were two rooms to the hut, a heavy tar-paper partition being the dividing wall.

On the rough board floor of the front room were blood stains. How did they get there? Possibly some trapper did it removing the skins of his catch. And there were numerous little holes in the wall—bullet holes. The wandering hunter had perhaps used the building as a target. Still, over it all there seemed to hang an air of tragedy. Or was it my imagination allowed to have full swing there in that isolated, lonesome place?

Time proved it was not, for one day before leaving the northern woods Sheriff Peck of that county, whose acquaintance I had formed, told me the following story. A part of it was imaginary description, a part was played, and that officer was one of the leading characters in the gruesome drama enacted there.

The sun was sinking behind the pines and cedars on the sand ridge. As it dropped lower and lower, and the shades of darkness began to settle over the cranberry swamps, myriads of insects tuned up for their night-long song. Occasionally the deep-throated, lonesome croak of a frog came from the banks of the little trout stream that purled around the foot of the bluff, disturbing the silence of the wilderness. Already the night breeze, typical of the lake regions, was stirring the pine needles of the tall trees.

Black Pete Nichols, hunter, trader, trapper and moonshiner, stepped through the door of the tar-paper shack and, with his rifle swung in the hollow of one arm, took an invigorating breath of the scented air. That the body of the squaw-woman slain by his hand was lying huddled in one corner of the single room behind him did not disturb Nichols's conscience in the least.

She had nobody to blame but herself. If she had not peached on him! He had cautioned her to stay away from the booze, but she did not heed, and he would take no further chances. It was lucky he had come upon her and the revenue man and heard it all. He had not been seen hiding in the bushes.

Returning from the illicit whisky plant, he had heard their voices down by the spring. To steal upon them and hear the drunken half-breed tell the stranger of his unlawful business was an easy matter for the man from the Northland.

And then the officer, with a smile of satisfaction on his face in knowing that he had located the source of all the trouble among the men in the lumber camps, had sneaked away through the timber. But he didn't know a Nemesis was following as he topped the first ridge and swung across the valley toward the second.

Pete had made the circle, and was in hiding on the second dune, a few yards from where the stranger must pass. It was not a long wait, for soon the man came into view as he clambered up the bank.

The long black barrel of the watcher's rifle was on a level with the officer's breast.

A pair of keen black eyes were squinting through the sights and a hairy finger lightly caressed the trigger. Then the rifle spoke.

The stranger stopped short in his tracks, there was a convulsive raising of his hands above his head, he partly turned, and then toppled over backward. A short struggle and the form lay still.

Pete peeped from behind the log and calmly noted the effect of the shot. For a minute he did not move, and then, swinging one leg carefully, silently, over the log, he slipped to the ground. That the fallen man was dead he did not doubt, for he never missed at twice that distance.

He hesitated a moment and then, working his way slowly down the incline, stood beside the silent figure. A thin red stream had come from beneath the broad shoulders and lost itself in the loose sand a few feet from the dead man's head.

With an oath Black Pete kicked the soft felt hat into the brush and turned toward the shack. He would arouse the squaw-woman from her drunken slumber, inform her that he knew what she had done, and then he would destroy all evidence by tearing down the still, killing his betrayer and burn the hut. Then what? Well, the country was big.

Tonight he was bidding the place good-by forever. Already the buzzards were soaring high in the heavens above the silent form on the hillside, and he would not exert himself by digging even a shallow grave for the dead officer. And the squaw-woman, how she had pleaded with him; but the little heap of ashes at the site of the tar-paper shack and the scattered bones stripped by the scavengers of the air would leave no tales.

By this time the sun had dipped behind the western horizon, and in a few minutes it would be dark. He would fire the shack and then away to safety and forgetfulness.

Two more steps and he leaned against the trunk of a convenient tree. His hairy hand caressed the stock of the rifle and a smile struggled to the corners of his mouth. A bird in a nearby tree fluttered to another limb and settled itself in a more comfortable position for the night. In the distance, toward the big river, a wood owl had begun his mournful Who! Who!

Nichols shifted to the other foot and glanced around at the fast-fading scene. Night was coming on rapidly now. Just a few minutes more and he would apply the brand and quit the place forever.

A twig cracked behind him and Pete swung around to find himself looking into the long barrel of Sheriff Peck's colt.

"Drop the gun, Pete, and up with your hands!" came the sharp command from that officer's lips. "One move and daylight will shine through you."

With an oath the cornered man made as if to obey, but quickly ducking, he sprang back into the hut, slamming the door behind him.

The officer's revolver began spitting fire. There was an answering shot from inside, and then silence.

The sheriff changed his position, and again the pistol cracked, once, twice, a third time; but there was no move from the besieged murderer. Peck dropped lightly to the ground and wormed himself toward the door. Once reached, he cautiously placed his free hand against it. Pushing easily, it swung inward, meeting an obstruction that moved easily. All was silent within.

Peck removed his flashlight from a side pocket and, holding it at arm's length, pressed the button. The bright streak of light flitted over the room, quivered, and then paused on the huddled-up form of Black Pete stretched at full length on the floor beside the silent body of the squaw-woman.

"The inevitable end of all such men," muttered the sheriff as he walked out the door.

The Breath of Suspicion

By SCHUYLER HAMILTON

CHAPTER ONE

WITH his hand in the battered bureau drawer, Robert Enderly, his keen, good-looking face of a sudden pinched and old, turned as the harsh voice reached him from the doorway:

"Well, young man?"

But, plainly, it was not well with Robert Enderly. The apparition in the doorway, hard-faced, with its double chin, the mouth a thin line, surveyed him in a boding calm. His landlady made one forward, heavy stride.

"Well, young man! What have you to say for yourself?"

Enderly grimaced, a mere facial contraction of the lips. As if under the hypnotic glare of those cold eyes, like pieces of obsidian, his face took on a sudden a mottled, unhealthy gray. The hand in the bureau drawer came up and out, as if dragged therefrom, with a stiff, clutching gesture, against his will. It opened and some bank-notes fluttered to the carpet.

"Ha!"

The landlady's exclamation was explosive, triumphant, inexorable as fate. Enderly stiffened.

"Why, Mrs. Verney, I—that is—I——" he floundered. "I—I can explain."

Before that tight-lipped silence he paused, hesitated, came to a full stop. His landlady compressed still farther her thin lips.

"Humph!" she said. "You can explain! I doubt it! I find you here in Mr. Arbuthnot's room, in the act of taking some money from his drawer. I suppose you can explain that. I suppose you will say that you were—ah—'depositing' it! Now, young man, before I call the police"—Enderly's mouth opened in a sudden gasp—"I will listen to your 'explanation,' but be quick! And—and stay right where you are!"

Enderly moistened his stiff lips. He had never liked Mrs. Verney from the moment when he had engaged the meagre hall-room adjoining the large, comfortable quarters of Pinckney Arbuthnot, and that his dislike was reciprocated he knew. There had been the matter of Elsa Barker, on the second floor rear; before Arbuthnot's coming he and Elsa had been just a trifle more than friendly; now, following the advent of Arbuthnot, with his florid manners of "a man-of-the-world," between Enderly and Elsa there had grown a slight constraint.

And Enderly had been rather put to it to make a living; Mrs. Verney was aware of it. Now he was in a tight place, and none knew it better than he.

His voice when he spoke sounded in his ears curiously inept, stilted, unconvincing.

"Why, you see, Mrs. Verney, it was like this," he said. "I—I met a tramp last night——" He faltered at the landlady's almost vocal sneer; then, gathering courage of a sort, he continued: "I met a tramp. Poor fellow, he seemed a rather decent sort. And I suppose it was—well—indiscreet, but I—I asked him up to the room. It was a bitter night, and the poor fellow had no overcoat, and so I brought him in. I suppose I shouldn't have done it; but I must say he looked clean, for a tramp—a sort of decent chap down on his luck."

He paused, hesitated under the landlady's hard gaze.

"And then, when I'd brought him in, I was ashamed of the charitable feeling, but I began to think of my money; I'd just been paid, you know. And I went next-door to Arbuthnot, and asked him to keep it for me until this morning, and he said yes, he

would, but that he was leaving early, and—and that I'd find it in the bureau drawer."

He stopped abruptly, like a clock that has run down. The landlady faced him with folded arms.

"A likely story, Mr. Enderly," she said coldly. 'And you expect me to believe it? Aside from bringing a tramp into my house, which is bad enough, I just don't believe you; your story doesn't hold water! See here!"

She made a sudden, darting swoop; her hand, reaching, had pulled out the drawers, one after another. Enderly's stare was followed by her sudden cry:

"Just as I thought! You and that tramp! Why—of course!"

For the contents of those bureau drawers were tossed and jumbled in inextricable confusion; plainly they had been ransacked by a designing hand. Inexorable as fate, her eye fixed upon Enderly in a grim, watchful look, the landlady moved ponderously to the closet.

And here again Enderly, his jaw slack, could only stare as the landlady, flinging wide the closet door, pointed in silent pantomime to a confusion worse confounded—shirts, ties, coats fallen from their hangers, flung right and left, in a chaotic jumble by a ruthless hand.

It was enough. The landlady closed the closet door with a click of finality. And then, for a moment, Enderly found voice:

"Arbuthnot left early, you know—ah—he might have been in a hurry, don't you think?" he offered weakly.

The landlady vented a sound between a grunt and a snort. Then:

"Bah!" she exclaimed, with a vast disdain.

"Is that all you can think of? I keep a respectable house, Mister Enderly; the breath of suspicion has never been directed against it, let me tell you, sir! And now—this!" She gathered headway like a millrace. "As far as I am concerned, you can do your explaining to the police! Perhaps *they* will believe you! Mr. Arbuthnot is a gentleman; in all the time he's been here he's never given me any trouble, in and out like a lamb, as quiet and well-behaved as you please." Her gaze on Enderly spoke, plainer than any words, the fact that, on more than one occasion in the past, he had been behindhand with his board. "And he's always paid me on the nail!"

Standing aside now, like an avenging fate, her right arm rigid, pointed Enderly on ahead, but as he went through the doorway he turned.

"But—just a moment, Mrs. Verney!" he said. "You must listen! Let me phone Arbuthnot; that's all I'll ask. *He* can explain!"

The landlady, lip between finger and thumb, her darkling gaze upon the young man where he stood, for a moment kept silence; then she gave grudging assent.

"Very well, sir," she told him. "But be quick about it! And remember, no monkey-shines, young man; I'll be watching you. Now—march!"

Behind him the landlady, the money firm in hand, Enderly went downward to the depths, approached the wall-phone and took the receiver from the hook.

"Worth, eight-eight hundred!" he croaked. Then: "I want Mr. Arbuthnot, please. Enderly—yes—and—*quick,* if you don't mind. Yes—*yes! Arbuthnot—what's that?"*

He groaned, clutching at the instrument. "He's *what?* Gone out! You don't expect him back? *Oh!"*

His face drained of its color to a pasty gray, he leaned sidewise, slumping against the wall.

CHAPTER TWO

THE landlady favored him with a sour grin.

"You might have saved your breath, young man!" she said grimly. "I'm too old a hand to be caught with a dodge like that! Mr. Arbuthnot is in his office, and you know it! And if you're playing for time, although I don't see what you expect to gain by it, it won't work with me! Now!"

Her face became all at once brusque, decisive.

"I want a policeman!" she said crisply into the telephone. "Yes—right away—49 Charlies street—yes—Mrs. Verney. Right!"

As a drowning man is said to review his past in one lightning flash of recollection, Robert Enderly, surveying the fruits of his one indiscretion, abandoned hope. He had been reckless, a trifle wild, if you like, but he had never been caught, red-handed, until now. Doubtless the resolutions that he made at that moment would have served him a lifetime could they have been carried out; but, as things were, he would have time enough and to spare to think about them—where he was going.

He groaned in spirit, and then, at the quick swish of skirts along the narrow hall, he stiffened like a soldier on parade, or like a man, say, who faces a firing-squad single-handed and alone.

"Elsa!" he called in a hoarse whisper, turning to face the girl who, from the shadows at the rear, came forward now, eyes like the night sky at soft dusk of April, mouth that had been fashioned for love.

But the gaze that she turned upon him now was cold, disdainful; cruel as only a woman's can be cruel; lip lifted from her white, even teeth.

"Not 'Elsa' to you, sir!" she said. "I saw you with that tramp, and now—this! I think I could forgive your slip; but hob-nobbing with a tramp; *sleeping* with him—faugh!"

She passed him by, imperious, her head in air. Enderly, white-faced, mute, leaning against the friendly wall, heard, all at once, the clamor of the door-bell, saw, as from dim leagues of distance, the gleam of the brass buttons, heard, almost as if they had been spoken in his ear, the words:

"You are the man!"

But the policeman's actual salutation was just a trifle different:

"This th' guy, lady?" he asked, pointing a blunt forefinger at the stricken Enderly. The young man, with his back to the wall, indeed, heard, in a daze, the biting tones of his landlady's voice in answer; saw, as in a world removed, the girl, lingering at the stair-head; then he braced as the officer, replacing his cap—he had, oddly enough, removed it upon entering—made one single, lurching stride.

"Well, now, young feller, I guess we'll take a little walk——" he was beginning, when, once again, there came the clamor of the door-bell; the policeman answered it.

It was Arbuthnot.

CHAPTER THREE

HE came in jauntily, breathing, for a moment, like a man who has been running.

"Forgot m' keys, people," he greeted them, and then stopped dead, his gaze upon the tableau in the narrow hall.

Between him and Enderly of a sudden a spark leaped, in a quick message, from eye to eye, as the accused man opened his mouth to speak, in Enderly's gaze a look that was frankly imploring, desperate—the look of a man at the last desperate urge of a pressing need. But for a moment he did not speak.

Arbuthnot, sleek, slim, hair roached back in a decadent aping of the latest mode; immaculate, from polished cordovan brogues to the trousers creased to a knife-edge of perfection, blazing two-carat stone in his lustrous Batik cravat, smiled, and the smile was as much a part of him as the clothes he wore, the jewelry that he affected.

He stared, grinning his cold grin, as Enderly's voice came at the last, strained and hoarse:

"Arbuthnot, old man, tell these people that it's all right—about the money, I mean—that I left it with you last night. Dammit, man, I've been through hell!"

There was a ring of truth in the words, and yet an undercurrent of strain, as if, indeed, the sight of Arbuthnot had been too much, or as if—as if the man with his back to the wall were pleading with him to help, to save, risking it all in the hazard of one desperate cast.

The landlady hastily told Arbuthnot what happened.

For a timeless interval there was a heavy silence, tense and strained. Then Arbuth-

not, his yellow eyes blazing in the darkened hall, made answer, and the words were like a summons of doom:

"What's this—a masquerade—a joke? You know as well as I do, Enderly, that you never handed me a single cent!"

CHAPTER FOUR

ENDERLY, his eyes twin points of flame set in his face, dead-white, made a lunge for Arbuthnot even as the thick arm of the policeman had come between. There was a click, a snap, and manacles were upon his prisoner's wrists.

"Easy does it, now!" he chided, as Arbuthnot, his face pale, had backed suddenly against the wall. Behind him Enderly could hear the voice of his landlady, acid-sharp; it ended abruptly on a rising note:

"A thief—why, he's just a common thief, officer! Certainly I will make a charge, and so will Mr. Abuthnot, of course!"

As in a mist of dreams Enderly beheld the girl's face, like a white, glimmering oval against the background of the dark; then, obedient to that tug upon his wrist, he was going out of her life without a word—a pariah—yes, as much a pariah as that homeless tramp; aye, and worse: branded a thief!

Head sunk between his shoulders (for, following that first lunging thrust at Arbuthnot, he felt curiously weak), he was going outward now, following the officer, with never a backward glance, when, once again, there sounded the clamor of the door-bell; it was loud and sharp, imperative with a quick, brazen clangor; the prisoner's pulse leaped up in answer, and there stood the Tramp.

At sight of the policeman his eyes narrowed at the corners; he seemed as if about to retreat; then, with a brazon hardihood, turning to Enderly:

"Hello, pal!" he said.

Enderly, staring, saw that he did not look quite so much like a tramp; the clothes were the same, but there was a difference in his manner—calm, controlled. He was turning to the policeman with a whispered word when there came a sudden flurry; Arbuthnot, head down, had made a diving rush along the hall, the tramp after him.

There was a brief, furious struggle; then, sitting calmly upon the prostrate Arbuthnot, the tramp, turning to Mrs. Verney, thrust back the lapel of his coat. On it was a policeman's shield. The "tramp" spoke:

"You see, ma'am, this bird," pointing to Arbuthnot, on whose wrists by now were the handcuffs transferred from Enderly's, "we've been watching him for some little time. He—well, perhaps it isn't mentioned in polite society—he's what they call a bad actor, I'll tell a man, when he's shot full of hop. However"—he paused—"we've got him, thanks to Mr. Enderly here." He smiled. "He didn't trust me at first on account of my appearance, although we were friends since boyhood; and I don't know that I blame him altogether. He didn't know much about me of late, of course, nor did he know I was a detective. He just pitied me when he took me in as he recalled our old friendship. I watched, and I saw him hand that money to Arbuthnot, or whatever he calls himself, and then, just a little while after Mister Arbuthnot left, I—ah—made a brief inspection of Arbuthnot's room for evidence against him.

He grinned again. The landlady, her face turned to stone, stood silent, her gaze upon the plainclothes man, and away. The plainclothes man went on:

"'Arbuthnot' made the mistake of coming back. I can put two and two together: I think he meant to run a whizzer on Mr. Enderly here; perhaps there was a reason; at any rate, he found the means ready to his hand."

He moved toward Enderly with a frank, friendly glance.

"Shake, if you don't mind, old friend," he said. "You're all right! Even if the bed *was* a bit of a tight fit for the two of us. And now—I must be going."

"So will I," said Enderly, "as soon as I can pack my trunk."

He turned, following the officers outward into the light, but his face, lifted to the pitiless blazing of high heaven, was unsmiling.

The Mutilated Clue

By GEORGE MOREHEAD

CHAPTER ONE

AT the time the incidents of this story transpired Charles Dalton was a cub reported on a Boston paper. He had a penchant for the investigation of curious or mysterious crimes, and an ambition to become, within a few years, a successor of Gaboriau and Poe as a writer of mystery stories. He had an influential friend who was deeply interested in the young man's career and was ever ready to give him a helping hand. This was Doctor Emerson, who was an old school-mate of Dalton's father, and who was recognized at this date as one of the leading surgeons of Boston.

At five o'clock on a cold afternoon in January Charley Dalton, in his quest for news, found himself on Arlington Street in the immediate vicinity of the surgeon's office. It was after office hours, but the young man rang the doctor's bell in the hope of finding him within. In a few minutes he was shown into the private office where the doctor was comfortably seated in an arm-chair, smoking a cigar and reading a copy of "The Surgical Review."

"Hello, Charley!" exclaimed the doctor. "Glad to see you. Sit down and have a cigar. What's the news?"

"Nothing doing, doctor. Boston seems to be as dead as Salem when one is looking for news. I thought you might be able to give me a story."

"Don't know of any at present; although a very strange incident occurred this afternoon which has an air of mystery about it."

"Is it a professional secret?"

"No; because I absolutely refused to entertain the case. It was a most extraordinary request."

"What was it, doctor?"

The surgeon laid aside his magazine, lighted a fresh cigar, and commenced his story.

"Amongst the patients who called to see me this afternoon there was a young woman who was an entire stranger to me; I had never seen her before."

"Pretty and interesting, I suppose," suggested the reporter.

"Yes, quite so. She was about twenty-five years old, fashionably dressed, and, when she raised the thick veil she was wearing she disclosed a face of dark complexion with sparkling black eyes and refined features. I sized her up as a foreigner, although she spoke perfect English. After she was seated, she drew the glove from her right hand and said to me:

"Doctor, I have heard of your skill as a surgeon, and so I have come to you for a slight operation—painful, perhaps, but not dangerous."

"I am at your service, madam; and if you will be so kind as to explain what it is, I shall be pleased to give it my attention."

Then this strange woman, leaning her elbow on my desk, extended her right hand to me and said, calmly and slowly: "I wish you to amputate the first joint of the middle finger of that hand."

"I took hold of her hand, examined the finger carefully, and found it to be quite healthy and normal. I was astonished at her request and must have shown my surprise as I said to her:

"I must say, madam, that I cannot understand why you have come to me. This finger is in perfect condition and I see no reason whatever for such an operation."

"And yet it is necessary—absolutely necessary," she replied, with a warmth that prejudiced me against her.

"There is nothing wrong with the finger," I declared peremptorily.

"I know that as well as you do," she exclaimed impatiently; "but I want it amputated at the first joint."

I looked at her for a moment and tried to read her thoughts, but without success. Still holding her slender, graceful hand in mine, I said:

"Why should I wantonly mutilate this pretty hand? It would be an outrage, a crime, with which I should reproach myself to my dying day. Come, tell me the reason—why do you wish it?"

"Do not ask me, doctor, do not ask me. You are a surgeon, and I come to you for an operation in your line of work—that is all."

"You must understand, madam, or Miss —excuse me, but I have not the pleasure of knowing your name."

"My name cannot interest you, doctor. Besides, if it were necessary to give you a name, it would be a false one; so it is useless to ask it."

I could not understand the woman; but I resolved to make an effort to solve the mystery. So, after a moment's silence, I asked:

"When do you wish me to perform this operation?"

"As soon as possible, doctor. Today, if you can."

Again I regarded her in silence in an effort to understand her. Finally, I said, to gain time:

"Madam, you do not seem to appreciate the situation. An operation of that kind cannot be performed offhand at a moment's notice. Besides, an anesthetic will be necessary."

"I am not afraid of the pain, doctor. I can stand that."

Her stubborn persistency made me angry. I could control my patience no longer, so I exclaimed:

"Madam, I cannot do it today—nor any other day. I am always ready to perform an operation that will save a life or relieve suffering; but I refuse absolutely and positively to lend myself to a mutilation that is as stupid as it is useless. To amputate a finger without a sufficient reason is, in my opinion, a criminal act for which I could be held legally responsible."

She looked at me in a cool, calculating way as she said:

"I judge from what you say that you would make the amputation if you considered it an act of necessity."

"Certainly, madam, in case some accident befell it, or something of that sort."

"Very well, doctor, I understand, and I will engage your services for the operation to take place—well, say tomorrow, or the next day."

"I shall be out of the city during the next two or three days. I cannot see you again before Friday."

I rose, as an intimation to her that the interview was at an end, and opened the door. As she was passing out, I said:

"You have urgent need of a doctor, madam, and I would advise you to consult a specialist in mental diseases."

"Now, my boy, that is the story of my unknown visitor. What do you think of it?"

"It seems to me," replied Dalton, "there is a criminal purpose behind her strange request."

"Yet she didn't look like a criminal."

"Of course not, doctor. The high-class criminal of today, to be successful, must possess an appearance of innocence and refinement in order to inspire confidence in their victims. The old-fashioned villain, with the marks of guilt and deceit stamped all over his face, has been relegated to the coarser forms of crime that thrive only in the dark. Your lady belongs to the intellectual type of villains, whose subtlety taxes the ingenuity of our best detectives."

"I expect you are right, Charley, and I bow to your superior judgment in criminal affairs. If she comes to see me again I will study her case from your point of view, and inform you of any new developments; that is, if you are interested in the affair."

"I am very much interested in it, doctor, as I think I can see the germ of an interesting adventure concealed in your little story."

CHAPTER TWO

DOCTOR EMERSON was seldom absent from Boston. Only an operation of exceptional importance could tempt him to leave home, and it was a case of this kind that caused him to go to the city of Providence on the following day. He remained there overnight, and it was the afternoon of the next day before he returned to his clinic, which he had left in charge of his assistant, Doctor Rand.

"Well, Rand, how are all the patients?" asked Doctor Emerson.

"Doing nicely. No complications of any kind."

"Anything new?"

"Only a trifling case that came in this forenoon. A slight accident. But the operation was quite successful."

"What operation?" asked Doctor Emerson, who was loath to have any operation performed in his absence. His confidence in his assistant did not extend as far as that.

"Oh, it was a simple affair," replied Doctor Rand. "The amputation of the first joint of a finger. She stood the operation very well and wishes to leave the clinic this afternoon."

"Ah! It's a woman! Who is she?"

"She said she was Mrs. King of 309 East Tenth street."

"What was the nature of the accident?"

"Perhaps I had better tell you the whole story from the beginning. This morning a taxicab drove to the door and a fashionably dressed lady alighted, by the aid of the chauffeur. When she entered the door she asked Marian, the head nurse, to pay for the cab with the money in her handbag, as she had no use of her right hand. Marian paid the chauffeur and asked him some questions about the young woman, but he knew very little of her. Then Marian called me. While I was examining her hand the woman explained to me that she was handling a revolver, not knowing, of course, that it was loaded, when it was accidentally discharged and the bullet struck the middle finger of her right hand. An examination of the wound satisfied me that the bone was so shattered that amputation of the first joint was necessary. But I was not satisfied with her account of the accident; so I said to her that the loss of the finger would not be a serious inconvenience, as she was left-handed. Immediately and without considering her answer she replied that she was not left-handed."

"What bearing had that on the case?" asked Doctor Emerson.

"Simply this: if she were not left-handed, why did she take the revolver in her left hand instead of her right, when she was examining it?"

"Quite right, Rand; I see your point. But what conclusion have you reached?"

"Nothing definite; although I suspect the so-called accident may have been a voluntary attempt at self-mutilation. The reason for it I cannot guess."

Doctor Emerson was silent for a few minutes; then he asked:

"Did you say it was the middle finger?"

"Yes, of the right hand."

"Describe the woman as well as you can."

After Doctor Rand had given him a detailed description of the young woman, the surgeon said:

"I thought so. It is the same woman who came to me two days ago and insisted that I should remove the first joint of a perfectly healthy finger, which I refused to do."

"It is strange that she should come back here."

"Ah! she thought I was out of the city. I remember telling her I had to go away for two or three days and could not see her again before Friday. What did the driver of the taxi know about her?"

"It seems she accosted him in front of the South Station, and so he thought she had come in on a train. She was very pale and weak, and the bandage on her hand suggested to the chauffeur that she was suffering from a wound. He offered to take her to the General Hospital, but she asked him to bring her here."

"That doesn't help us much," said Doctor Emerson; "and I still have a conviction that there is some criminal or fraudulent purpose connected with this affair, which I shall try to discover. I wish you would

send Marian to me, and then see the patient and tell her that, in her present weakened condition, it is impossible for her to leave here alone. Some one must accompany her. We have our own reputations to maintain, and must insist upon seeing her safely home again. Tell her one of the nurses will go with her."

CHAPTER THREE

MARIAN, the nurse, was a woman about thirty years of age, short and slender, not at all pretty, but she was attractive and a favorite with the patients on account of her sweet smile and gentle manner. When she entered the office she said:

"You sent for me, doctor?"

"Yes. There is an affair of a confidential nature which I wish you would undertake. Nothing serious, you understand, but it calls for a certain amount of wit and discretion."

"I shall do my best to please you, doctor."

"I am sure you will. It concerns the young woman who came here today to have her finger treated. Now, I am anxious to find out who she is and where she lives. When she leaves here this afternoon Doctor Rand will insist that she is not in a fit condition to go alone and that you will go with her. In my opinion, she will not go direct to her place of residence, but will do something to throw you off the track, and it is up to you to follow her, without her knowledge, until you find out where she lives and, if possible, her name. Do you understand fully just what I want; and do you think you can do it?"

"Yes, doctor, I should love to do it. It is just like detective work."

"That's right, Marian; but you must be a good sleuth and not let her get away from you."

When Doctor Rand explained to the young woman why it was necessary to send a nurse with her on her way home she made a virtue of necessity and informed the doctor that she would be pleased to follow his advice. Consequently, when she left the clinic Marian was at her side. A taxicab was called and the young woman told the chauffeur to drive to the Berkshire Chambers on Washington street. On the way she explained to Marian that her husband had an office in that building and she expected a letter to come there for her. This did not sound very convincing to Marian, but she could not say so; she could only watch and await events. She also told Marian that she would not require her to go any farther; that Marian could return to the clinic in the taxi, and gave her three dollars to pay the fare.

When they arrived at the Berkshire Chambers the young woman bade Marian good-by and walked hurriedly into the office building. But Marian was not to be so easily deceived. She stepped quickly from the cab, noticed that the office building was a large one, built on the corner of two streets and had, no doubt, an entrance from each street. She entered the building, hastened through the lobby and passed out by the door leading to the side street just in time to see her late companion enter a black-and-white taxicab and start away. A moment later Marian had returned to the taxicab she had just quit and told the driver to follow the black-and-white cab. The chase was on; but it was of short duration. The first cab stopped in front of the Fountain Hotel, not far from the South Station, and the young woman entered the hotel through the ladies' entrance.

Marian remained in the taxi for a few minutes until she thought the unknown woman had had time to reach her room in the hotel. Then she alighted from the cab and walked directly to the hotel. At the ladies' entrance she stopped and spoke to the negro door-porter after having crossed his black palm with silver. She asked him if he had seen a young lady enter a few minutes before.

"The young lady with the bandage on her hand?"

"Yes, yes, that's the one."

"I sure did see her, lady."

"Can you tell me her name?"

"She is Mrs. Castro."

"Has she been stopping here very long?" asked Marian, thinking of the fictitious name and address the woman had given Doctor Rand.

"She came here about two weeks ago with her husband. I think they came in on a steamer from Cuba—from Havana, I reckon."

"Is her husband here now?"

"No, lady, he went away three or four days ago."

"Thank you very much for the information; I may see you again."

Then Marian started on her return trip to the clinic, well pleased with her work.

CHAPTER FOUR

IT was on the morning of the eleventh day that Charley Dalton entered the private office of Doctor Emerson in a state of great excitement. He was carrying a newspaper, which he held aloft, as he exclaimed:

"It has come at last!"

"What's all the excitement, Charley?"

"Murder, doctor, murder!"

"Murder! Who? What is it?"

"Your patient, doctor. Have you seen this morning's paper?"

"Not yet."

"Read that," said Dalton, as he spread the newspaper on the surgeon's desk. Omitting the glaring headlines, the article was as follows:

"A mysterious crime, resulting in the death of a woman, who was a guest of the Fountain Hotel, was committed early yesterday. The disappearance of the woman's husband causes suspicion of the murder to fall upon him.

"Three weeks ago a man and woman came to the hotel and registered as 'Carlos Castro and wife, Havana, Cuba,' and have been living there since. The husband was absent for a few days, but returned to the hotel on Tuesday. The man was about thirty years of age, tall and slender, dark complexion, black hair and mustache, well-dressed in dark clothes and black fedora hat. The woman was a few years younger, a handsome brunette, with a tall, graceful figure. They maintained an air of reserve and formed no acquaintances in the hotel. In fact, it is said they sought to avoid observation.

"Yesterday morning at eight o'clock the couple settled their bill and left the hotel, asking, however, that their room should be held for them during their absence, as they expected to return in three or four days. No one saw either of them return to the hotel, and yet, at half-past two o'clock a chambermaid discovered the dead body of the woman in the room which she and her husband had occupied. Apparently the victim had been killed in her sleep, as there was no sign of a struggle.

"The police have found the taxicab which carried the couple to the South Station, but all trace of them has been lost at that point."

The surgeon looked up with an air of stupefaction and shook his head as he replied:

"I don't know what to think of it. I can't make head nor tail of it. What do you say?"

"Well, I am going to Police Headquarters and get a permit to see the body. Then I will know if it is the woman who had a portion of her finger removed ten days ago. You see, the police have no knowledge of that little incident, but I suppose it is our duty to put them wise in regard to it."

"Certainly. In view of the crime that has been committed, we cannot conceal a fact of that importance from the police. After you have seen the body come and let me know the result."

CHAPTER FIVE

CHARLEY DALTON hurried to Police Headquarters, and, being a newspaper man, he had no difficulty in getting permission to view the body, and when he informed them of the recent amputation of one of Mrs. Castro's fingers a detective was sent with him to investigate and report on that feature of the case.

When they were in the presence of the

body they examined the woman's right hand, and, sure enough, the first joint of the middle finger was missing.

"There you are!" exclaimed the detective. "That's the woman, all right."

"Not so fast, sergeant; look at it again. How long a time since she lost that finger, do you suppose?"

The detective gave the finger a more critical examination and replied:

"I see it's a very old scar. She lost that finger many years ago, it seems to me."

"Quite right," said Charley, "and that proves the fact that this is not the body of Mrs. Castro, whose finger was amputated only ten days ago."

"Then who is it?" asked the detective.

"That's what we have to find out."

The two men parted at the door—the detective to make his report at Headquarters, and Charley Dalton to continue his investigation of the mystery. First, the reporter went to the Fountain Hotel to view the scene of the crime and gather information from the employees. He was well known to the manager of the hotel, which made his task an easy one. He was shown the room which had been occupied by the victim and her husband, but it contained nothing of interest to the reporter. Then the manager opened a door which gave access to an adjoining room and said:

"This room was occupied by a woman named Teodora Peralta, who came here the same day as Mr. and Mrs. Castro."

"Were they friends or acquaintances?"

"Yes, they were friends, as they frequently dined together in the restaurant. I amagine there was a prior acquaintance between them, as they are all Cubans, and I think they came from there on the same boat."

"What became of Madame Peralta. When did she leave the hotel?" asked Dalton.

"Well, she paid her bill Thursday night and said she was going to leave by an early train on Friday morning. She did so; but there is something strange about it; none of the employees saw her leave the hotel. Yet her baggage was gone."

"That is strange," said Dalton, "very strange. She disappeared the same morning that Mr. and Mrs. Castro left the hotel. What kind of a woman was she? What did she look like?"

"She was a tall, dark-complexioned woman about twenty-five or thirty years old, rather pretty, and was, in fact, a dead-ringer for Mrs. Castro. The two women looked so much alike that they might have been twin-sisters."

"Did you ever notice whether Madame Peralta had a mutilated finger?"

"No, I did not. But perhaps our phone operator can tell you more about her, as I noticed that Madame Peralta had frequent talks with the telephone girl."

Dalton thought he had now exhausted the manager's stock of information, so he requested an interview with the telephone operator. After the manager had introduced him and Dalton had explained the purpose of his inquiries, he asked the girl what he considered the most important question—the one on which the solution of the mystery seemed to depend.

"Did you notice anything wrong with one of Madame Peralta's finger?"

"Yes," replied the girl," she showed it to me herself. The top of one of the fingers on the right hand had been cut off. She said it was done five years ago."

"The middle finger, was it not?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," said Dalton. "Now, I would like to know if Madame Peralta had many telephone calls."

"Very few. But she made two long-distance calls to Buffalo, and spoke to a lawyer there. She told me that a distant relative, her mother's cousin, had left her a large legacy and she was going to Buffalo to get it in a few days."

"Do you remember the name and address of the lawyer in Buffalo?"

"No, but I can get it," said the girl, "as I keep a record of all long-distance calls."

The girl searched her records and found the name and address of the lawyer to be Hiram Jackson, Iroquois Building, Main street, Buffalo.

Equipped with this information, Charley

Dalton had no difficulty in reconstructing all the incidents connected with the tragedy. The three characters concerned in it were residents of Havana and had been acquainted with one another there. That Madame Peralta came to the United States to claim and collect a legacy. That she was accompanied or followed by the two Castros, who had evil designs on the legacy, and had formed a plan to kill Madame Peralta and substitute Mrs. Castro in her place. For that purpose it was necessary for Mrs. Castro to have the upper joint of her finger removed in order to complete her resemblance to Madame Peralta. In pursuance of this plan they had killed Madame Peralta and placed her body in the room which had been occupied by the Castros, and thereby suggested that the dead woman was Mrs. Castro. The man Castro and the false Madame Peralta had now gone to Buffalo to collect the legacy. Such were the conclusions reached by Dalton, and the evidence he had collected fully corroborated his theory of the crime.

CHAPTER SIX

CHARLEY DALTON went to Police Headquarters, laid before them all the facts he had collected, and urged upon them the need of speedy action to catch the criminals before they received the money in Buffalo. The first thing to do was to send a telegram to the lawyer advising him of the death of Madame Peralta, and warning him not to pay the money to any person whomsoever. This was done, and a detective was assigned to go to Buffalo to make the arrest. He was armed with a warrant which charged Carlos Castro and his wife with the murder of Madame Peralta.

Next morning, on their arrival in Buffalo, Charley Dalton and the detective sought to get into immediate touch with the attorney. As it was Sunday they had to seek him at his residence. They found his address in the directory, and were fortunate enough to find him at home. Having first explained the object of their visit, they asked the lawyer if the pretended Madame Peralta had called on him.

"Yes," said the lawyer, "yesterday morning a man and woman called at my office to collect the legacy due to Madame Peralta. The woman said that was her name, that she was the legatee, and she offered to furnish proofs of her identity. As it was Saturday, which is a short day in our business, and I had an engagement at the Country Club at one o'clock, I told them nothing could be done in the matter until Monday morning, and I made an appointment with them at my office tomorrow at ten o'clock."

On Monday morning before ten o'clock the stage was set in the attorney's office for the reception of Mr. and Mrs. Castro. The detective from Boston, accompanied by a detective of the Buffalo force, were seated in Hiram Jackson's office, while Charley Dalton and a local detective were placed in the outer office ready to give their assistance if required. Promptly at ten o'clock Mr. and Mrs. Castro made their appearance, and were shown into the private office. Mr. Jackson introduced the two detectives as the executors of the will under which Madame Peralta became entitled to the legacy, and in that way explained their presence at the meeting. The Cubans were given seats on the side of the room farthest from the door, and the detectives sat near the door so as to thwart any attempt to escape.

Addressing the woman, the attorney said:

"You tell me that you are Teodora Peralta of Havana, Cuba, and that you are the legatee named in this will?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, madam, as you are a stranger to us, it will be necessary for you to furnish satisfactory evidence of your identity before I can advise the executors to pay you this large sum of money."

"Certainly," she replied; "I have all my papers here; my certificate of birth, my passport, letters, and other documents."

She took a number of papers from her handbag and handed them to the lawyer, who glanced through them and selected the passport, which he opened and read. After which he said to her:

"This passport states, as a mark of identification, that Madame Peralta is lacking the first joint of the middle finger of the right hand. Will you be so kind as to let me see your right hand?"

The woman extended her right hand, covered with a black kid glove which had evidently been made to order to fit the mutilated finger.

"When was your hand injured in that way?" asked the lawyer.

"About five years ago," she replied.

"Will you please remove the glove? I wish to see the finger."

Again she extended her hand toward the lawyer and said:

"You can see, even with the glove on, that a part of the finger has been removed. Isn't that sufficient?"

"No, madam, I wish to see the finger."

"Do you doubt the lady's word?" asked Castro, who could not control himself any longer.

"No, not at all," replied the lawyer, "but she is bound to establish her identity to my satisfaction, and I am not yet satisfied."

"You have her papers," said Castro—"letters of identification, her passport, and you can see for yourself the middle finger first joint is missing. What more to you want?"

The lawyer rose from his chair and gazed defiantly into Castro's eyes as he said to him:

"Yes, there is something more. I want to know the name of the woman who was murdered in the Fountain Hotel in Boston last Friday."

That was like a bolt from a clear sky. It was so unexpected that it threw Castro into a panic. His eyes bulged; the color left his lips; he rose from his chair, trembling, but instantly fell back again in fright and terror. He proved to be a coward, a nerveless poltroon. The woman was the better one of the two. She retained her calm demeanor, and boldly asked:

"What has that to do with the payment of my legacy?"

"Everything," said the lawyer. "Madame Peralta is dead, and you are an impostor."

"That's a lie!" exclaimed Castro, rising again and reaching to his hip-pocket as if to draw a revolver.

But Grady, the Boston detective, rushed at him, grabbed him by the shoulders and forced him back into the chair, while the Buffalo sleuth snapped the handcuffs on his wrists.

"What does this mean?" asked the prisoner.

"That you are wanted in Boston for the murder of Madame Peralta."

During the excitement Mrs. Castro tried to make her escape. She moved quickly to the door and passed through it to the outer office, but that was the extent of her flight. Charley Dalton and the detective stationed there seized and held her in a firm grasp until the two prisoners were safety seated in the patrol wagon.

A few weeks later Castro and his wife were tried and convicted of the crime, and the Boston papers accorded to Charley Dalton a full measure of praise for his prompt and clever work in this affair. But Charley is now in a dilemma. He has become rattled by the noise of his own fame. He is undecided whether to become a criminal investigator or a writer of detective stories. Why not both?

WON FROM AN OLD PRISON PAL

A JILTED rival is said to have caused the arrest recently of Morris Curtis, fifty, known as the "Marquis" and released two months ago from Matteawan on a charge of violation of the Sullivan law. He was arrested in Brooklyn.

A prison associate, John Hawkins, in the Tombs facing a twenty-year sentence for robbery, whose sweetheart had been won by the "Marquis," wrote to the police telling them where Curtis could be found. Detectives found Curtis and the girl, known as Gladys Williams.

They say they also found two automatic pistols and several hundred neckties, part from a recent robbery in Hempstead, L. I.

Beating the Burglar Alarm

By JOE BURKE

CHAPTER ONE

ALTHOUGH the ancient aphorism, "Scorn a woman and tempt the devil," is moth-riddled, it still retains its virulent prestige. If the old adage had not run true to form, Bull Buddy would not be an unwilling "guest" of the State of Massachusetts, with a life term.

Bull's cognomen was plain Edward on the payroll of the Danville Mills, where he worked as a laborer. He was the poorest combination of crook and pseudo respectability that ever prowled the byways of crime.

The moniker "Bull" was tagged on him by his weaker brothers. He was a coward at heart and a bully by nature. As a crook —well, he was simply a snoop. His game was to acquire information, and peddle it out to the highest bidder. He sold his knowledge secretly. He bartered with petermen, cracksmen, and the lesser crooks who solicited his aid.

"Say, Bull," growled Red Manning from the corner of his mouth, "I've got a century dat's not workin' fer a lay on old Fritz Berger's jewelry shop. De ol' bird never leaves de dump only when he goes to tie on de feed bag. De joint is a 'net,' an' da ain't a Chinaman's chance to crack it at gloom. His can is only a blind for de dicks; you know dat he's a fence, an' gotta pile planted somewhere. Look him over, give me de steer about his joint an' de hundred iron men's yourn."

This talk took place in the back room of Peg-leg Bowler's Tap. Red Manning was a super-crook and did big things. Berger was a jeweler and lived in a room at the rear of his shop. That is to say, he slept there. It was also known to the police on both sides of the "dead" line that he was a fence—a buyer of stolen diamonds and other valuable stones. Headquarters had thus far been unable to pin anything criminating on him. The result was that he had never been obliged to change his somber, shiny black suit for one of a louder pattern and coarser texture, with stripes running around the coat and pants.

It was not the lack of courage that stayed the adroit hands of the nocturnal vultures from separating the aged fence from his hoard. But as Red conjectured, the place was a "net." In other words, it had its burglar alarm wires entirely concealed.

The alarm boxes were embedded in the walls at points not ascertainable by any one but an expert, and all of these wires were hidden in the walls and floor. It was a device fashioned by skilled minds in such work, but—sad to confess—there are also highly scientific minds in the underworld.

Red Manning possessed no such mind himself. The haul that the fiery-thatched crook had in mind was somewhat uncertain. Therefore he enlisted the services of the "snoop," Bull Cuddy, to learn if the profits would be large enough to make it worth while to burglarize the place.

Strange as it may seem, Bull was never "mugged" by the Headquarters' photographer. Neither had they smeared his finger-tips with ink to set his prints. He had been questioned on several occasions, of course, but until the time of his downfall the police had never been able to connect him with any of the robberies committed in the city.

Bull worked most of the time at odd jobs in the Danville Mills. That took the "curse"

off, as the detectives said, whenever he was on the grill. He was acquainted with the aged jeweler. Red Manning was aware of that. Hence the barter, with a hundred dollars as a reward. When he left Manning, Bull was in a thoughtful mood. He saw prosperity coming his way and he needed it, as he had an affair of the heart. At least his narrow soul thought so. His girl was no diva or bathing beauty—just a simple, clean-minded, drudge of all-work in the cheap hotel which he called home. His stalwart physique appealed to the undernourished slavey. She believed him to be honorable and honest, and worshiped him in a silly way. When Bull "lorded and mastered" it over her, it gratified his vanity to see her fawning mien. This is how things stood when the snoop was engaged to pipe a lay, as Red called hunting for a place to be robbed.

CHAPTER TWO

THE month was December, during Christmas week. Bull had returned to his room after eating supper in a near-by lunch-room. Snow was falling without, and the snoop's mood was far from pleasant. After numerous visits to old Berger's place, he at last was primed with the knowledge of the jeweler's secret hoard. The crook had sauntered in noiselessly the night before, discovering Fritz gloating over his treasures. Pearls! Sapphires! Diamonds, and the Lord knows what! A king's ransom! Bull's greedy eyes burned as he went home.

"You never take me to the movies any more," complained Bull's girl when he strolled in. Emily Shine was her name. She had bearded Bull in his room, and was humbly taking him to task. "You useta take me twice a week, Ned; but you don't any more. Is—is it that flapper in the movie ticket office? If I had the swell rags I'd look as good as her. I'm gonna spread out some day, Ned. You wait an' see." The crook paid no heed to her complaint and left the room.

All that night and the following day, while Emily Shine was fretting under a delusion that a short-haired vamp was usurping her, Bull Cuddy was probing his brain for a means to gain possession of Berger's fortune for himself.

"A hundred dollars? Bah!" he thought. "I'll get it myself. But how?"

That was the problem that he was pondering over when Emily Shine encroached on his privacy again.

He was standing at the only window, gazing abstractedly out at the falling flakes. He whirled on the intruder, his face black with rage.

"Beat it!" he snarled.

"Bull," she whispered, "are you after that girl at the movies?"

"What th' devil is it your business who I hook up wid, you bum! You gonna spread out? Hully gee, but you're funny! Know any more jokes? Get out so's I can die laughing."

The poor ungainly girl was stunned. Her face, white as marble during the affrontment, was quivering with emotion. She staggered from the room, slamming the door behind her. Outside she sank slowly on the stairs and buried her head in her hands. Her thin, bony shoulders rose and fell in rhythm with her sobs. Then a mocking laugh was wafted through the open transom. She sprang erect, her tearful eyes pools of hate, and rushed below.

Bull Cuddy, as usual, damned the alarm clock as it startled him from his repose the next morning. It was long after midnight before he had fallen asleep. Before so doing he had fully made up his mind to undertake a venture that was entirely new to him. Robbery! The lure of the jeweler's hoard had spurred him on. Why should he sell his valuable information for a paltry century note to Red Manning?

All day long Bull worked at the mill, and all day long he muttered execration against everything in general. But he chuckled with silent glee when he thought of the wealth which he intended to purloin that night.

"De poor saps," he ruminated, eyeing the mill hands with aversion. "Dey'll be muckin'

it here when I'm straddlin' de world. Oh boy! Home, James."

He laughed outright at his mental picture of the future.

At five o'clock the mill whistle interrupted his train of thoughts, and he surged out with the other workmen, stopping only to appease his appetite in a one-arm lunchroom. As he turned the corner of the street on which the hostelry was located he came face to face with the one man—the only man—of the city's police department whom he really feared—Headquarters' Detective Frank Sheeren.

"Hello, Bull," greeted the officer. "Still working?"

Detective Sheeren was a man of very few words. His manner was neither cordial nor abrupt. When he spoke, he did so almost mechanically, as though iterating a formula. Even the crooks dubbed him a square "dick."

"Hello, Mr. Sheeren," Bull rallied from the shock to return the salutation. "Sure I'm workin'."

He could feel the Headquarters man's gray eyes searching his very thoughts.

"That's good," Sheeren said offhandly. "Stick to it. You'll find it pays better in the end. But I want to give you a bit of advice," he added slowly, turning up his top-coat collar to ward off the snow-swirl that was then enveloping them. "Keep out of Peg-leg Bowler's rumhole or you're likely to have a run-in with Headquarters. We've never been able to pin anything on you yet, Bull. As far as I'm concerned, I hope we won't, if you don't deserve it. But watch your step, and keep on working. There's another thing you ought to do: get out of that scratch house you're living in and take up decent quarters. I yanked a couple of yeggs from the Coast out of there the other day. They'd been hiding in that dump for the past month."

After this whole-hearted sermon the detective turned on his heel and breasted the storm. Bull, his massive shoulders huddled to his bat-wing ears, looked after the officer's bulky form until it was lost from view.

"Wise guy," he muttered, mounting the steps of his lodging house. "But I'll swallow your dope when I get ready. After my little coup blows over—if de old jeweler makes a yell—I'll can dis dump, sure. Me an' dat swell broad in de cash-box of de Arcady will hit for some burg dat never heard of prohibition. She's some dandy skirt, I'll say. An' to tink dat scarecrow Emily Shine was on my list when chickens like the other dame'll fall fer me!"

His soliloquy teminated with the closing and locking of his room door.

After a few minutes, during which he had carefully selected several things from the false bottom of a small trunk, he again emerged from his room and walked slowly down the stairs to the shabby, unclean office. A one-eyed, burly looking individual, who answered to the name of Jake, looked up at him from behind a battered desk.

"Hello, Bull," he growled, boring the "snoop" with his single optic. "What's on yer chest?"

Bull Cuddy grinned and yawned sleepily. From the tail of his eye he noted with keen satisfaction that Emily Shine, who was puttering about, was lending an ear in their direction.

"Nothin' much on my chest, Jake," Bull made known, another sleepy gesture following in its wake. "I'm dog tired tonight, an' gonna go to bed. If any of those guys from de works blow 'round, shoo dem away. I'm gonna hit de straw now, an' pound me ear till mornin'. Get me?"

"All right, Bull," growled Jake, "your flop is paid fer—die if yer wanna."

CHAPTER THREE

BUT Bull Cuddy did not die nor pound his ear. Far from it. He simply walked laggingly back to his room. Once inside, and the key turned in the lock again, his languor vanished. He was alert, alive and furtive.

Stuffing the things which he unearthed from the trunk into a pocket, he dimmed the only light in the room, then tiptoed to the door. From a book of cigarette papers he carefully selected one of the delicate

tissues, moistened it with his tongue, and just as carefully pasted it, one half on the door, the other half on the door frame. The idea was that if the door should be pushed open the soft paper would become detached or break. There was not much of a chance of any one entering the room while the key was turned in the lock. But Bull Cuddy knew that chambermaids had uncanny methods of "laughing at locksmiths" when rushing to finish their work. And Emily Shine was a chambermaid, and on this certain night Bull wished to make sure that she did no snooping in his room.

Next he turned off the light entirely, then drew from beneath the bed an old pair of shoes. These he cast on the floor with a loud bang at a second's interval. Then with as much noise as possible he grunted loudly and threw himself onto the bed, making it squeak. There he tossed and sighed wearily for a few more seconds, then lay still. Another minute passed. A loud snoring was added to the stertorous breathing of the crook.

After several more minutes Bull Cuddy arose quietly and glided to the window. He raised the sash warily. The storm was still venting its fury without, and Bull smiled grimly as the snow-swirls lashed his face like myriad whips.

The window looked down on an obscured alley, just over the floor on which the rooming house office was located. The window below was boarded up. The alley, on a night like that, was void of pedestrians. Bull also knew that, whatever footsteps were imprinted in the heavy snow beneath the window, would soon be entirely obliterated by the feet of milk venders after midnight. He then carefully brushed the snow from the windowsill, swung lightly out, then slid down a new conduit pipe which had been installed a few days before, landed in the soft snow, and hurried away.

He met no person on his short trip, and brought up standing before a door at the rear of old Berger's shop. The door in question was a formidable affair. One upper panel had been removed and a pane of glass had been set in. On the inside, across the dirty pane, were several strong steel bars which were fastened firmly on the inside.

But Bull did not brave the storm to match his wits and skill against strong doors and steel bars; he came to assure himself of the old German's absence, so he could beat the "net."

Satisfied that Berger had closed his shop for the night, as the only light discernible within was a single electric bulb before the safe, Bull, his cap pulled down low on his forehead, retraced his steps. He floundered back till he stood before a vacant, tumble-down house which was connected with the building where the jeweler's shop was located. He shaded his eyes with his hand and swept the surroundings. The alley was void of human beings. Through the swirling flakes, any one passing the mouth of the alley would be unable to see ten feet. Bull Cuddy was pleased with himself that night thus far. He darted through the door of the tumble-down house, that swung drunkenly on one rusty hinge, whining in rhythm with the shrieking wind.

With the aid of a pocket flashlight Bull gingerly descended a flight of rickety stairs to the cellar. Rats scurried in every direction at his intrusion as he picked his way through the slimy débris. At the wall which divided the two buildings he stopped, and brought from his pocket a pair of cheap cotton gloves. These he pulled over his hands. Next he drew a broken box towards him; on this he set his flashlight, the pencil ray focused on a space on the wall. At the place the light was centered on a drain pipe ran through the wall where at some time or another repairs had been made. A large aperture had been made in the wall, and when the plumbing work was completed the opening was closed with stone roughly pointed-up with inferior cement.

Again Bull chuckled and grinned in the darkness. Then from his pocket he drew a short steel bar and attacked the patched hole.

Some ten minutes later he straightened up and mopped his perspiring face. At his feet lay a diminutive pile of stone and mortar. Beneath his lowering gaze was a black,

gaping hole, jagged, but large enough for his body to pass through.

Removing the cotton gloves, he cast them on the floor, grinding them with his heel into the spongy surface. Then with the aid of his flashlight Cuddy crawled into the jeweler's cellar.

He stood in the inky darkness and listened. The snarling storm without was the only sound. Nothing more. Even the rats were silent. He found the ladder which rose to a trapdoor in the floor above and ascended. At the top he paused and listened again. Still silence. He pressed up on the trapdoor. It was bolted. He expected that. He swept the rafters with his light for wires. There were none. The "net's" hidden tendrils did not embrace the trap leading to the cellar.

Again he brought the steel bar into action. A dull splintering of wood was heard, then the door succumbed.

Bull fitted over his ham-like hands a pair of thin rubber gloves, pushed up the trapdoor and stepped on to the floor of Fritz Berger's jewelry store.

(To be concluded in our next issue.)

A FRENCH CRIME MUSEUM

THE old "Conciergerie," the medieval prison on the Island of the City in the heart of Paris, will be transformed into a "Museum of Justice and Police," where children of the primary and high schools may come to study the evolution of the methods of detecting crime and administering justice through the ages.

The somber walls of the prison, with its dark dungeons, still contain all the instruments of torture in use during feudal times to extract confessions from men charged with crimes or misdemeanors. Documents showing the plots, counter plots and intrigues of the Renaissance, and the uprising and violence of the nation during the Revolution have been preserved in its cellars.

A bill has been introduced in the Chamber of Deputies by M. Petitjean requesting the Government in view of the great crime wave now sweeping France—murder, acts of violence and thefts—to gather these historical relics into a museum, so as to instill into the minds of youth a salubrious fear and horror of crime.

All the political upheavals and religious wars of the last thousand years have contributed to the history of and left their mark upon the old prison. Originally it formed a part of the palaces of the kings of France. It was rebuilt by Saint Louis, and became a prison under Charles V, who in 1391 placed there in irons and chains a certain number of citizens of Nevers and the Nivernais, who had raised the standard of rebellion against his rule.

In the fifteenth century the Court of Armagnac, Grand Constable of France, six bishops, several members of Parliament and a number of women and children were massacred there without mercy by the populace.

Count Louis de Berquin, a nobleman from Picardy, was burned alive there by order of Francis I.

Catherine de Medici had Count Montgomery put to death within the prison walls.

Ravaillac, the assassin of Henry IV., was tortured and quartered in the yard which now serves as a stable for the horses of the Parisian mounted police.

Damiens, who attempted to slay Louis XV, and Cartouche, the famous highwayman, were guests of the prison under the last of the Bourbons.

During the Revolution more than 1,200 prisoners were packed in the building when the mob broke down the doors and massacred the majority of them.

Marie Antoinette, Mme. Elizabeth, the sister of Louis XVI, and Robespierre awaited their trials in the Conciergerie.

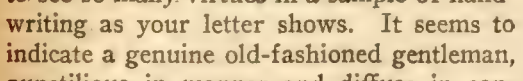
The aspect of the building is forbidding, three high towers commanding the entire island.

What Handwriting Reveals

CONDUCTED BY LOUISE RICE

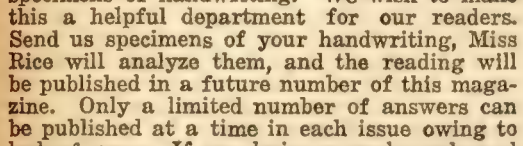
The article "What Does Your Handwriting Tell you," which appeared in No. 157, brought us such a flock of inquiries and requests for service on graphology that we have started such a department, conducted by Miss Rice. She is well known for her character delineations based on deductions from specimens of handwriting. We wish to make this a helpful department for our readers. Send us specimens of your handwriting, Miss Rice will analyze them, and the reading will be published in a future number of this magazine. Only a limited number of answers can be published at a time in each issue owing to lack of space. If you desire an early reply and personal letter from Miss Rice, cut out the coupon on page 63 and send it to us, enclosing 10 cents and a stamped envelope to cover the cost of stationery, handling, etc., and Miss Rice will promptly send you a personal reading. The following are answers to a number of our readers who have written to Miss Rice. —THE EDITOR.

JOHN D. ST. C.—It is quite a rare treat to see so many virtues in a sample of handwriting as your letter shows. It seems to indicate a genuine old-fashioned gentleman, punctilious in manner and diffuse in conversation. But, like many of the old school,



you find it difficult to accommodate yourself to the changed conditions of the present generation. You are too stiff-necked and conservative to be at ease in careless society. Lack of decorum worries you. It is useless to ask a man of your age to change his habits—they have become too fixed with years of practice.

JAMES BARKER—For lack of space I can only reproduce a small specimen of your writing. My analysis is made from the rest of your letter. Here we have a splendid character—one who has had nothing less than a high-school education. You must have been trained or had the inclination to become a bookkeeper or an accountant. You would have made good as a bank clerk, too.



The formation of your letters betray muscular development that might have come from gymnasium training or field games at school. Affable and with a keen brain plus the "gift of gab," you might have made a very successful salesman, and good sellers certainly make money, or they would not try to sell things.

YOUNGSTOWN, O.—The evenness of your pen pressure and the uniformity of your letter formations show me that you are one of those sensible, well-balanced and moderate people who make life possible to those of a more excitable temperament. Your weakness is that you are too much inclined to stay in a rut; that you are too apt to be influenced by what seems to be the force of circumstances. You "stay put" too much. Also, you are greatly inclined to live your life as others wish you to, instead of making it your own. Notice that very, very short "t" bar of yours? Well, that tells me that you need to cultivate your will power and your aggressiveness. Don't be afraid. You couldn't be too aggressive if you tried.

B. A. C., CANADA—That ability that you have to change from one style of writing to another may mean any one of a dozen different things, according to the mental devel-

opment and character growth that you have. In your case, it simply means that your character is not yet developed. You were taught the "back hand," but as the back hand shows reserve and a withdrawn and self-centered nature, and you are just the opposite, instinct makes you slide off into the rightward flung style of writing, and this is the way that you will write all the time as soon as your character is set, as it were. The rightward style, which shows the real you, will become more pronounced as you grow older, and as the affection, frankness in showing affection and real sweetness and fineness of your nature asserts itself.

HARRY BOND—A careful analysis of your writing shows that you should make a good mathematician—a bookkeeper or accountant. Your mind seems analytical, a good qualification for the above professions. Figures are distinctly your forte, and might lead you into a higher profession. There is little commercialism indicated, consequently the inference that you should not make a good business man. Your tendencies are more of the literary order—idealistic. It does not pay nowadays to live in the clouds of imagination. Only hard work brings good compensation. It is odd in your case, for most mathematicians make pretty good business men.

F. A. D.—The sample you sent was written slovenly, the paper was dirty and the words unfinished. What can a poor graphologist judge from such a missive? What sort of person would mail a lady such a distressed looking letter? And yet a study of the handwriting shows that the writer is careless and indifferent about appearances. The writing shows a very high-spirited character with an almost ungovernable temper. Yet you are kind-hearted, generous to a fault and have good sound judgment. Evidently you are one who could handle huge projects with great speed and accuracy. As a manager of a big enterprise you could be a success, for you are all business. But for pity's sake cultivate more neatness and care, as they are your worst drawbacks.

ADA RICHLAND.—Now, here's a sample of writing that I like to get. A care-free schoolgirl given to all the little vanities of her sex, crazy about pretty hats and dresses, and very, very fond of jewels and ornaments, society, music and theatre. This is normal. You have a well-balanced brain, keen discernment, and are inclined to be critical in a sort of analyzing way. I do not believe you would let any boy turn your brain for, although you like them well enough, they do not impress you very seriously. You should excel in out-of-doors sports and games, and are in a strong, robust condition of health. The profession best suited to you is not stenography—it's too confining. Seek something that will keep you out in the air to retain your splendid muscular development and sunny disposition.

Statement of the ownership, management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of "MYSTERY MAGAZINE," published semi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1924. State of New York, County of New York:—Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared Luis Senarens, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Editor of the "MYSTERY MAGAZINE," and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication, for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443, Postal Laws and Regulations, to-wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor and business manager are: Publisher—Harry E. Wolff, Publisher, Inc., 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y. Editor—Luis Senarens, 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y. Managing Editor—None. Business Manager—None.

2. That the owners are: Harry E. Wolff, Publisher, Inc., 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y.; Harry E. Wolff, 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y.; M. N. Wolff, 166 West 23d Street New York, N. Y.; J. F. Desbecker, 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y.; R. W. Desbecker, 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y.; C. W. Hastings, 166 West 23d Street, New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona-fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association or corporation has any interest, direct or indirect, in the said stock, bonds or other securities than as so stated by him.

LUIS SENARENS, Editor.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of March, 1924.—Seymour W. Steiner. (My Commission expires March 30, 1924.

Read This Notice

Following our new policy of giving you more and better stories than you ever got before, we have prepared the following material for our next issue, and we are confident you will enjoy reading it.

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THE EDITOR.

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

The feature stories already published in this magazine are worth reading. The following are the titles of the novelettes contained in the numbers already printed.

99 "The Cross," by W. S. Ingram.
100 "The Secret Service Mystery," by Hamilton Craigie and Elliot Balestier.
101 "A Crimson Price," by Elliott Lester.
102 "The Inspector's Strange Case," by G. Jacobs.
103 "A Museum Mystery," by Jack Bechdolt.
104 "The Little Red Book," by J. Alexander Young.
105 "A Man from Siam," by Chas. F. Oursler.
106 "The Clue of the Emerald Ring," by B. Poynter.
107 "Hell's Hinges," by Hamilton Craigie.
108 "The Wolf," by Katherine Stagg.
109 "The Brass Button," by Jack Bechdolt.
110 "A Whispering Mummy," by Chas. F. Oursler.
111 "Trapping the Jewel Smugglers," by B. Poynter.
112 "The Missing Evidence," by Harold F. Podhaskl.
113 "A Clue by Radio," by Capt. Jack Static.
114 "The District Attorney's Secret," by C. Oursler.
115 "A Man From Headquarters," by H. Craigie.
116 "The Girl in the Case," by Carl Glick.
117 "A Scientific Detective," by D. G. McDonald.
118 "Number Nine Queer Street," by Jack Bechdolt.
119 "Trailed by a Private Detective," by Gottlieb Jacobs.
120 "The Mouse Trap," by Edith Sessions Tupper.
121 "A Radio Mystery," by Capt. Jack Static
122 "The Clawing Death," by Beulah Poynter.
123 "A Master of Millions," by Chas. Fulton Oursler
124 "The Secret of Room 13," by Hamilton Craigie.
125 "Six Months to Live," by George Bronson-Howard.
126 "Seals of Wax," by Jack Bechdolt.
127 "When Crooks Conspire," by Harold F. Podhaskl.
128 "The Mystery of the Blue Car," by H. Craigie.
129 "The Detective and the Law," by Frederick F. Shuey.
130 "The Hand in the Dark," by Chas. F. Oursler.
131 "The Trail of a Rogue," by George Bronson-Howard.
132 "The Woman from Nowhere," by Jack Bechdolt
133 "The Time Detective," by Frank Blighton.
134 "The Whispering-Room," by Frederick C. Davis.
135 "One Clue Missing," by Chas. F. Oursler.
136 "The Doom of the Damned," by Joe Burke.
137 "The Consuming Death," by Gilbert Hammond.
138 "Mrs. Deane's Jewels," by Beatrice S. Luisi.
139 "The Brass Voice," by Jack Bechdolt.
140 "For Shame," by Wm. Hamilton Osborne.
141 "The Triple Cross," by Hamilton Craigie.
142 "Blood Rubies," by J. Werner Phelps.
143 "I'll Win! I'll Win!" by Arthur B. Reeve and Margaret W. Reeve.
144 "Phantom Fingers," by George Bronson-Howard.
145 "On the Yellows," by Frank Blighton.
146 "The Argentine Ruby," by Beulah and Shirley Poynter.
147 "The Barrington Arms Case," by Jack Bechdolt.
148 "Hounded," by Frank Blighton.
149 "Direct Action," by Dr. Harry Enton.
150 "The Footprints On the Ceiling," by Chas. Fulton Oursler.
151 "The One Chance," by Thomas Ripley.
152 "Weapons of Hate," by Eric Howard.
153 "In Reserve," by Frank Blighton.
154 "The House on the Rocks," by Jack Bechdolt.

If you cannot procure any of the numbers you want from your newsdealer, send us the price, ten cents, in money or postage stamps, and we will mail them to you postage free.

The price of the following numbers is 15 cents:

155 "Laughing Death's Trail," by Nels Leroy Jorgensen.
156 "The Medicine Dropper," by G. P. Wilson.
157 "A Question of Kick," by Eugene Jones.

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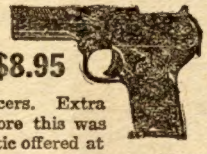

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Finding "The Fountain of Youth"

A Long-Sought Secret, Vital to Happiness, Has Been Discovered.

By Walter S. Dean

Alas! that spring should vanish with the rose!
That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!
—OMAR KHAYYAM.

A SECRET vital to human happiness has been discovered. An answer to an ancient problem which, sooner or later, affects the welfare of virtually every man and woman. As this problem undoubtedly will come to you eventually, if it has not come already, I urge you to read this article carefully. It may give you information of a value beyond all price.

This newly-revealed secret is not a new "philosophy" nor a financial formula. It is not a political panacea. It has to do with something of far greater moment to the individual—human happiness, especially in the later years of life. And there is nothing theoretical, imaginative or fantastic about it, because it comes from the coldly exact realms of the practical where values must be proved. It "works." And because it does work—most delightfully—it is one of the most important discoveries made in years. Thousands already bless it for having rescued them from disappointment and misery. Millions will rejoice because of it in years to come.

The peculiar value of this discovery is in its virtue for lifting the physical handicaps resulting from the premature waning of the vital forces of life, whether due to overwork, over-worry, sickness or the general over-expenditure of nervous energy in the strenuous living typical of the modern day. True happiness does not depend on wealth, position or fame. Primarily, it is a matter of health. Not the inefficient, "half-alive" condition which ordinarily passes as "health," but the abundant, vibrant, magnetic vitality of superb manhood and womanhood.

Unfortunately, this kind of health is rare. Our civilization, with its wear and tear, rapidly depletes

recuperative capacity, and, in a physical sense, old age comes on when life should be at its prime.

But this is not a tragedy of our era alone. Ages ago a Persian poet, in the world's most melodious epic of pessimism, voiced humanity's immemorial complaint that "spring should vanish with the rose" and the song of summer too soon come to an end. And for centuries before Omar Khayyam wrote his immortal verse, science had searched—and in the centuries that have passed since then has continued to search, without halt, for the fabled "fountain of youth"—the means for renewing energy and extending the summer time of life.

Now, after many years of research, joyful reports from thousands show that lives clouded by the haze of too early autumn have been illumined by the summer sun of health and joy; old age, in a sense being kept at bay, and the physical and mental vigor of former years again enjoyed in work and recreation. And the discovery which so adds to the joy of living is easily available to every one who feels the need of greater energy and vitality.

The discovery had its origin in famous European laboratories. Brought to America, it was developed into a product that has won the highest praise in thousands of cases, many of which had defied all other treatments. In scientific circles the discovery has been known and used for several years with extraordinary gratifying appreciation for the success it has demonstrated. It is now put up in convenient tablet form, under the name of Korex compound, for distribution to the general public.

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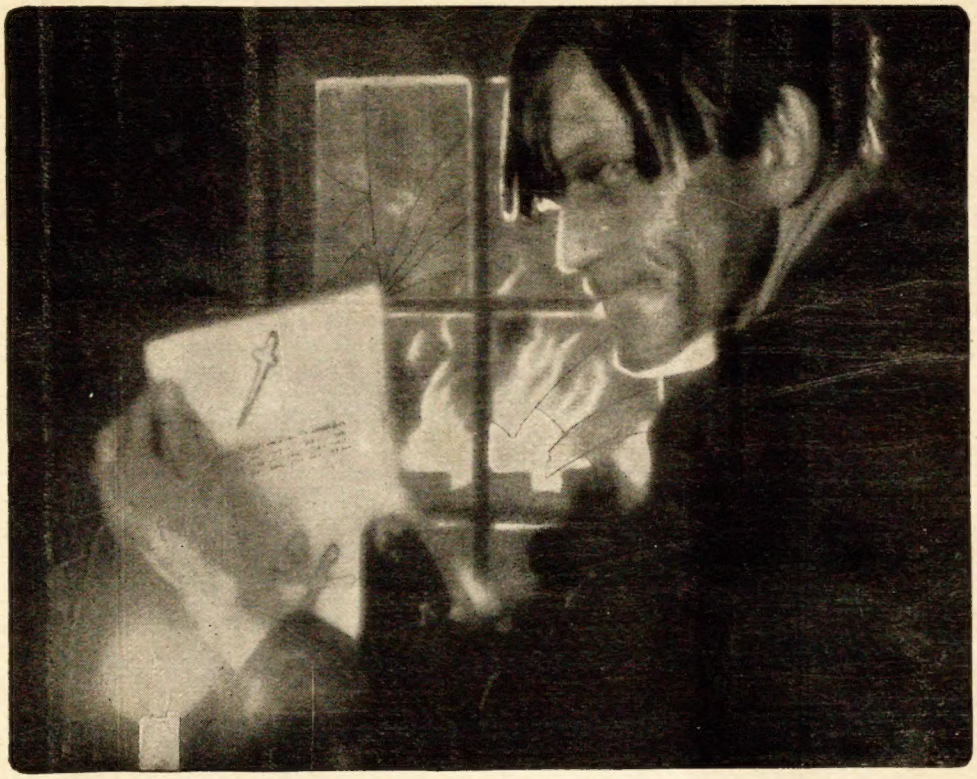

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